



7

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY: A MEASURE OF OUR TRAINING TO DISCERN GOOD AND EVIL

Dr. Boris Ustinov was the cherub-faced young chief physician of the first privately operated nonprofit hospital in Russia since the 1917 revolution. The hospital was located on the campus of a famous seminary and only had forty beds, but supplying it with equipment and medicines was as much of a challenge as taking care of the patients. Boris considered it a great honor to represent the Russian Orthodox Church in their partnership with the city government and our foundation, and he spent most of his time at the hospital overseeing what had become a widely known and respected ministry to the elderly. He was the epitome of a gentle, caring healer with the administrative skills we needed to keep our project on track. Moreover, his studious pursuit of how to combine western medical methods with the compassionate care of believing nurses and doctors was a testimony to the failed Russian health care system about what the right leadership could accomplish.

Our foundation had helped the Russian Orthodox Church remodel and equip what had been one of the last church-run hospitals to close following the Russian revolution. To say the least, it was a tiny project with a huge profile as Russians and westerners alike monitored its progress and made humanitarian contributions

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

to support its needs. On my frequent visits to St. Petersburg, I audited the usage of the medicines we had contributed as well as the expenditures of grants we had made for various remodeling and budget items. Each time, I found the records to be in immaculate condition, always balanced, and with the staff and accountants ready to provide whatever documents I requested. Dr. Ustinov and his colleagues had repeatedly proven their reliability, even submitting to surprise inspections of the pharmacy without reluctance. After nearly two years of operation, we had great confidence in Dr. Ustinov's integrity. Our only concerns were for his personal health and well-being. Still single and an active member of the Diocese, he had immersed himself in the routines of providing care for his patients.

During one visit, I had gone to the seminary offices on business unrelated to the hospital. I asked one of the administrators (who was also a good friend of Dr. Ustinov and had recommended him for his position) how Boris was doing. I had not yet met with Dr. Ustinov on that particular trip and the distinct change in the seminary official's countenance alarmed me. It was so unusual that I asked, "What's wrong? Is something bothering you about Dr. Ustinov?" He said, "Oh, it's probably nothing, but he has been acting irritable lately and has been uncooperative and difficult to reach. He's been away from the hospital a lot." This sounded nothing like Dr. Ustinov, so on my way out, I decided to stop by unannounced, as I had before, to have a cup of tea with him, and see for myself how he was doing. As soon as I entered the hospital, I sensed something was wrong. The atmosphere was tense and the beaming smiles were missing from the staff's faces. I nodded to a couple of nurses passing by and proceeded directly to Dr. Ustinov's office; my uneasiness growing with each step I took.

I knocked and no one answered, so I assumed he was somewhere else in the hospital. I stood in the hallway outside the door to his small, cramped office thinking that he would probably emerge from one of the patient rooms. In a few minutes, he suddenly burst out of his office and nearly ran into me, as though he was leaving in a hurry. He looked haggard and disheveled and said he had just awakened from a short nap after being at the hospital all night. He

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

said that he was on his way home but invited me into his office to chat for a few minutes. Boris was nervous and uneasy and he sounded defensive when I asked a couple of simple questions about him and the hospital. I decided that I had caught him at a bad time, so I made an appointment to come back the next day. However, as I left his office and walked across the campus, I had a disturbing thought flash through my mind about Dr. Ustinov. What I had seen in his face and eyes was more than fatigue. Something significant had happened to him since my last visit, and it was not a good thing.

As I pondered what I could do to help the young doctor, I realized that my meetings at the seminary and with Boris had produced two gentle nudges to indicate that I needed to more diligently investigate the facts. Experience had taught me to be concerned that there might be something hidden from our view, so I asked a trusted friend who had well established relationships with both the Seminary and hospital staff to help me investigate the cause of Dr. Ustinov's decline. If Boris had worked himself into bad health, we had to stand by him. Nevertheless, his evasive, darting eyes, and oppressed countenance might indicate something more harmful, and we had a responsibility to our patients, staff, contributors, and many others to be sure. Visitors often compared the new Russia to Chicago during the "cops and robbers thirties," and I knew that Dr. Ustinov's behaviors could have very serious roots. I had to leave for the U.S. in just a few days and had little time to thoroughly investigate the matter. However, I could take no chances because a multi-million dollar shipment of medicines was on its way to St. Petersburg. So I quietly put several preventative measures in place and left for the U.S., expecting to return shortly to oversee the arrival of the specially licensed cargo of valuable narcotics.

The morning of our return, we discovered that Dr. Ustinov had been abducted in plain view of several witnesses. The startling significance of the event was simple. The thing we had been most concerned about might be taking place—a hostage for medicines trade. But we had not yet received a ransom call and the seminary was abuzz with rumors regarding Dr. Ustinov's disappearance and his possible linkage to a gang of young criminals trying to form yet-

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

another mafia group. Some students had been standing outside the seminary when he arrived for work and as he approached the hospital, they saw three men force him into a car and drive away. They recognized one of the men as being a thug who had been hanging around the campus. We had excellent contacts with the police and called to ask for their special attention to the situation. They responded very quickly and soon arrived at our office to report that Dr. Ustinov had been badly beaten, but had been let go by his captors and was now safe at home. But in the words of the police, he had been beaten “by his colleagues not his enemies.”

The information we now had from multiple sources merged into a clear picture of what had happened to Dr. Ustinov. The young doctor had become entangled with these men by accepting pornographic magazines and other favors from a childhood friend. Because he was a high-profile representative of the church, and feared being exposed, he was being blackmailed into cooperating in a scheme to sell our just-arriving medicines on the black market. However, the procedural changes I had put in place before I left made it impossible for Dr. Ustinov to deliver on his promises. What his mafia handlers thought was going to be a profitable relationship was not going to pay off and they were angry with him. We wondered how much of a threat we still faced because once someone opens the door to such people they do not easily leave. One thing was certain. Boris had crossed a dangerous and clearly drawn line, so we had no choice but to appoint a new chief physician. We narrowly missed what could have been a disaster for everyone associated with our project.

Perceptual clarity is a measure of our training to discern good and evil. To make good decisions about our family, work, or spiritual life, we must acquire reliable facts by asking questions, evaluating relevant information, and making accurate judgments about people and their circumstances. When we make mistakes, we must be ready to identify with the people involved and express empathy in a wise and practical way. By placing truth, kindness, and faithfulness, above loyalty to a person or organization, we can gain a clearer understanding of the facts. Then we must carefully decide what actions are required and how to apply mercy where it is needed.

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

“The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out” (Proverbs 18:15).

The Hebrew word that is translated as “discerning” (# 995) in Proverbs 18:15, literally means to perceive, understand, or consider a matter by mentally separating (or judging) its parts and pieces. It is very similar to the Greek word that is translated in Hebrews 5:14 as “discern,” which means to distinguish, judge, or make a judicial estimation. Here it is in its context:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to *discern* (#1253) good and evil.”

Hebrews 5:12-14 NAS

Discerning, or good judgment, comes as the result of practicing with both the spiritual and natural human senses. Spiritual awareness might include a moment of clear vision, wisdom, knowledge, or insight into good or evil, given to you by the Spirit of God. Our natural senses become sharpened through the disciplined practice of searching out the facts. When we feel uneasy or reluctant, (as I did with Dr. Ustinov) it may be that the Lord is using our spiritual senses to warn us that some fact or perception is not accurate or that there is more that needs to be known. Then by searching for reliable information and testing the validity of our perceptions, we can become certain of what we think the Lord is trying to show us. Discerning is not a guessing game about what our spiritual impulses mean or from where they are coming. It is a disciplined search for the truth and for hidden or disguised problems. Over time, and through the sometimes-distasteful repetitions of many difficult situations, we can produce a reservoir of wisdom and insight with which to more effectively discover the facts and make good judgments.

Pursue the Truth with Heartfelt Empathy

The dictionary definitions of truth, knowledge, and wisdom follow an interesting sequence. Truth is defined as “the actual state of a matter as it conforms to fact or reality.” Knowledge is based upon our “acquaintance with truth, facts, or principles, as the result of study or investigation.” And wisdom is “knowledge of what is true or right, coupled with good judgment.” These definitions establish truth as the essential element of wisdom and judgment. In other words, a good or just decision is entirely dependent upon reliable facts, or truth, that has been studied or investigated. Proverbs 9:10 says that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” So the fear of the Lord—recognizing and respecting God as our Creator and Father—is the first truth. When we obey Him we have made a wise decision, one that will allow us to acquire further wisdom and separate the precious from the worthless in all that we do.

There are literally dozens of Scriptures that refer to truth, knowledge, wisdom, or judgment. For example, King David said in Psalm 51:6, “Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.” His son, King Solomon said in Proverbs 23:23, “Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding.” In Zechariah 8:16 the Lord said, “These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts.” And in John 16:13, Jesus, speaking of the Holy Spirit, said, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.” These Scriptures show us that truth is central to our relationship with God and our ability to make reasonable judgments. It is also necessary to express empathy in a godly way.

To empathize means to “identify with the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another person.” Mere human empathy is based largely on emotions. But for godly empathy to flow through us to another person, we must have knowledge of the truth and be able to correctly judge their circumstances. For instance, when a person tells us a heartrending story we might be emotionally moved. But empathy is based upon finding the truth and identifying with another person’s predicament. When a person is not telling the truth, godly empathy

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

does not naturally flow through us because God, who knows the truth, does not respond to lies. Instead of being driven by emotions, godly empathy is based upon reliable facts, which allow us to identify with a person's need and then reach out to him or her in a realistic way.

I remember a young man who came into our church offices one day to ask for financial help. Since I was the only man around, the ladies in the office asked me to help him. He had already told them a very sad story about being destitute and homeless and how he needed a bus ticket to get home. It was a heartrending story that had them all in tears. I immediately felt reluctance in my spirit as if the Lord was alerting me, but I agreed to talk with him. I asked him to repeat his story and as I listened I prayed for wisdom. I recognized some inconsistencies in both his story and his appearance. His hair and clothes were rumpled, but he was wearing expensive shoes that were not at all the attire of a destitute street person.

He was more likely a middle-class drug addict trying to pick up an easy \$100 by scamming a church. If that were so, to him our meeting was like a sales call. Two or three quick interviews and he would have the money he needed for a couple days. As I asked him a few questions about his life in the streets he became noticeably uneasy and just at the moment I had concluded with certainty that he was lying, he said rather abruptly, "Are you going to help me or not?" I said, "No, not unless you tell me the truth." He jumped to his feet and stormed out of the office yelling nasty things at me over his shoulder. The ladies in the office looked out the window just in time to see him leap into a shiny new jeep and drive angrily away. Their benevolent feelings turned to anger when they realized how easily they had been deceived and led astray by their emotions. They had not even considered questioning his story because they misunderstood what it meant to express empathy.

But how did I know his story was phony? Actually, I didn't at first, but I had learned not to ignore that sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach and to keep asking questions until I knew for sure whether or not it was a false alarm. Chaplain Max Jones, a prison chaplain with over thirty years experience, had trained me. My first day as a volunteer he explained to me how difficult it is to discern

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

whether or not a person is lying just by looking at them and listening. “The more they have lied to get their way, the easier it is for them to look and sound innocent. You have to keep talking and asking questions until you are sure.” He knew what he was talking about because he had led some of the most famous criminals of his time to Christ. He understood God’s love and was willing to spend whatever time was necessary to get to the truth. He believed that dealing with the truth was the only thing that would fully and completely set a man free.

After I had gained some experience, Chaplain Jones took me into a “lock-down” facility. It was a prison within a prison where they kept what the other inmates referred to as the “crazies.” The men in these cells were so deeply troubled that they were a constant danger to themselves and others. There were yellow lines painted down the hallway in front of the cells to remind you not to get close enough to the cells that they might grab you. You could be seriously hurt in an instant because in their psychotic state, they often had almost superhuman strength. It was like visiting a cellblock full of demoniacs (Mark 5:1-17). My job was to quietly walk down the hall, stop briefly in front of each cell, greet the person, and see if he wanted to talk. The visits were simple acts of mercy intended to demonstrate that God still loved them.

I was easing my way down the hall when I saw an inmate whose condition literally stunned me. He was a young man who appeared to be no more than twenty years of age. He was short, about five feet, four inches tall and as completely muscular as any body builder you might ever see. He had huge shoulders and arms and a tiny waist. He was standing in the middle of his small cell with his shirt off, flexing his muscles and looking straight into my eyes with the terrifying look of a predator ready to attack. His head was shaved and he had a huge tattoo of an eagle that covered his entire back and head. The beak of the eagle came down over his forehead onto his own nose, and its wings spread out across his arms. When he flexed his muscles the eagle nearly came to life.

I stood there speechless just looking into his lifeless eyes. They were like deep dark holes with no discernable expression except the occasional surge of intense hatred. We stood only about six feet

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

apart separated by what then felt like thin little steel bars. Finally, I was able to get out the words, “Good Morning,” sounding as friendly and cheerful as I could. He only grunted, but I knew from my training that in this case it qualified as communication. At least he wasn’t throwing feces at me or doing some other vulgar things to express his rage. “My name is Larry.” Another grunt. As I spoke to the man, I was praying, asking God for wisdom to know what to say. The first thing that came to my mind was a vision of a toddler standing in a small, dilapidated crib with that innocent look that every parent knows. Then the Lord spoke to my heart, “This man was someone’s baby boy.”

Compassion flooded my soul. I was overwhelmed with feelings of deep sympathy and sorrow for whatever suffering or misfortune had brought him to this place. My training reminded me that his crimes were extremely violent for him to have ended up where he was today. But I was not ignoring his crimes or the penalty he was rightly paying for them, I loved him as the Holy Spirit loved him through me. Although I didn’t say anything very spiritual, I knew that I was transmitting God’s love. That was the purpose of my visit. I could not possibly identify with him or empathize with his pain. There was no place in my brain that could fully understand it. But my words were being carried to his heart by the overwhelming love of God. He said nothing until I turned to leave and then in a low tormented voice he said only, “Thank you.” It was more than enough.

I have learned that everyone has a story that, if you knew and understood it, would cause you to have compassion for him or her. Sometimes all we can do is listen and express God’s love. But before we can take any effective actions to help, we must first try to identify with them and make a reasonable judgment by gathering the information we need to make a just decision. Unfortunately, there are lots of people in our world who will say absolutely anything to get what they want or to get away with what they are doing. Each of us must learn to act wisely because some of the most dangerous people are not found in prisons.

Charles and Denise, a mature, middle-aged couple had come to me for counseling. They were experienced believers and I wondered

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

what it might be that brought them to my office. I had begun receiving a steady stream of unexpected appointments, usually from people who had visited one or more of the other pastors on our staff before coming to me. I hoped that, unlike the others, it had nothing to do with Pastor Joseph, who had left the church under a hail of accusations about infidelity. He had denied most of the accusations and only admitted to “grave mistakes” before he resigned, so there were many issues surrounding his behaviors that were still unsettled.

As they sat down in my office, Charles and Denise began to speak very quietly, almost in a low whisper. Both their countenances were downcast and sullen. They were obviously depressed and suffering under some kind of oppression. They told me how confused they had become in their walk with Christ and how they no longer felt confident to make decisions or judgments about simple problems in their life. I asked them a quick series of questions about how long they had been confused, what might have happened at about the time it began etc., trying to discover if there might be a proximate cause for their tormenting disorientation. They looked at each other as though they were afraid to answer, then Charles said, “Actually it started about two years ago when we first confronted Pastor Joseph, but the other pastors we have spoken to about our problem have told us we were probably wrong in getting involved or that the incident probably had nothing to do with our confusion.”

At my urging they told me about how they had been praying for Pastor Joseph one night and were shocked to hear the Lord saying to them that some of the inconsistencies they were seeing in Pastor Joseph’s ministry were because he was involved in a sexual relationship with a woman named Sonia they knew about in the music ministry of the church. They kept this information to themselves and continued to pray, occasionally receiving what they thought were confirming impressions from their prayers, Bible reading, and personal observations. They felt the Lord urging them to speak directly to Pastor Joseph, so one morning as the service ended, they approached him and shared their story. They said he appeared really disturbed but spoke kindly to them, explaining that what they had heard was clearly not from the Lord because he had no such relationship with anyone. They knew that he had later admitted to “mistakes,” but their impressions had

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

been very specific and they had heard nothing about Pastor Joseph and Sonia. The other pastors had told them that they didn't need any specifics and that it was just better to forget the whole incident. It was after their discussions with Pastor Joseph and his colleagues that confusion overcame Charles and Denise and their spiritual struggles began.

The truth was that we didn't have enough specifics to know how to counsel people like Charles and Denise, which left a lot of unanswered questions for many confused people. But one thing was clear, it was wrong to tell them these things were not important. They had either heard from the Lord or they hadn't. And if they were right, then Pastor Joseph had probably lied about a lot of things to a lot of people. We scheduled another appointment and as they closed the door behind them I lowered my head in anguish, frustrated that I was unable to help them. As I called on the Lord for help he brought to my mind Isaiah 16:3-4 (NAS), "Give us advice, make a decision; cast your shadow like night at high noon; hide the outcasts, do not betray the fugitive. Let the outcasts of Moab stay with you; be a hiding place to them from the destroyer." I knew that the Lord was asking me to help them find the truth and set them free from this torment. At that moment I saw in my mind's eye an older woman who I knew to be a serious intercessor and who prayed for the church. The Lord said to me, "Go and see her."

I arrived unannounced and knocked at her door. Before I could finish explaining the purpose of my visit, she said, "I know why you're here, it's about Pastor Joseph and Sonia isn't it?" I was dumfounded. I told the lady about Charles and Denise and how Pastor Joseph had denied any relationship. She was very involved with Sonia, who was divorced. She told me how she often baby-sat her children and about the incident she observed one night when she had stopped by for a visit. The kids answered the door and took the lady directly to their bedroom to play as they often did, and she had assumed that Sonia was busy in another part of the house. A few minutes later she heard the sliding glass door to the patio open and expected it to be Sonia coming through the living room and down the hall. But through the crack in the door she could see that it was Pastor Joseph who walked down the hall and into Sonia's bedroom where she was waiting, never realizing he passed so closely

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

to the well-respected, retired missionary. The dear old lady tearfully provided other irrefutable facts that Sonia had later admitted to her.

Armed with this evidence, I was able to confirm the word of the Lord to Charles and Denise. As I led them in a prayer of forgiveness for Pastor Joseph and others who had either wrongly rebuked or misled them, each of us experienced relief. They were no longer under a cloud of confusion and doubt about their discernment. And I was no longer trapped between my empathy for these dear people, my obligation not to judge without the facts, and my lack of information. The empathy and compassion they needed and that I wanted to express was connected to an accurate judgment of Pastor Joseph. Then we could apply mercy to everyone involved. Charles and Denise left my office beaming, free from the condemnation that had tormented them.

Inquire, Probe, and Investigate Thoroughly

The pursuit of the truth involves much more than an empathetic attitude. It requires reliable methods to discover the facts. Remember “truth” is defined as “the actual state of a matter as it conforms to fact or reality” and “knowledge” is based upon our “acquaintance with truth, facts, or principles, as the result of study or investigation.” Sometimes the truth is not as obvious as it may appear and finding the “whole truth” can take some effort. The first question most people ask about pursuing truth is “how much information is enough?” The answer is found in Deuteronomy 13:12-15:

If you hear it said about one of the towns the Lord your God is giving you to live in that wicked men have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, ‘Let us go and worship other gods,’ then you must inquire (#1875, ask or question), probe (#2713, examine intimately, search, and explore) and investigate (#7592, earnestly request or demand) thoroughly (#3190 until you do well and are successful and right). And if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

has been done among you, you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town. Destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock.

Serious questions require serious amounts of information. But in every case there must be enough information to be certain you have the truth. I learned very early in life how important it was to be sure of the facts. Everyone in the aerospace industry wanted things to be certain. For instance, every supervisor wanted to know “enough” facts about the work their crew had just performed to be comfortable with putting his or her signature on a pre-launch checkout document. If there were to be a failure (which commonly meant a very large explosion in my dad’s days of rocketry and/or the possible loss of life when I was working in the Apollo program), the first thing the investigative team did was search for the root cause and begin to “earnestly request or demand” answers from the person who approved the work on the failed subsystem. The investigative team’s objective was not to find someone to blame. It was to find the person with the information that could possibly lead to the “truth” of the matter, what actually went wrong and why, so that it could be corrected. That’s the real value of truth—being able to do things right.

But the more important question is “how do I know my information is reliable?” Simply put, reliable methods produce reliable results. The method I have learned to rely upon and which has repeatedly proven its dependability at home and at work is called the “scientific method.” All of the activities of the scientific method are characterized by an attitude that stresses “rational impartiality” or the unbiased search for reliable facts and truth. Although this method of inquiry involves some detailed techniques for investigation and analysis, my intention is to emphasize only its basic tenets, which are very user-friendly. Following are the steps of the scientific method:

- 1) Observation. When we become aware of a specific problem, circumstance, event, question of fact or phenomenon that requires an explanation, the first step is to gather enough information by simple observation or inquiry to clearly state the problem and its significance.

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

2) Hypothesis. On the basis of the initial information that is acquired, a hypothesis (or general idea) is formed about what the information means or how it explains an unknown or unproven issue.

3) Investigation. The implications of the hypothesis (the facts that you think can be proven to be true) are then further considered and tested by additional observations, investigations, and, when possible, experiments.

4) Testing. If the investigation produces additional facts that are in disagreement with the original hypothesis or its implications, the hypothesis is modified or discarded in favor of a new hypothesis, which is then subjected to further investigation and tests. This process is repeated until the results of investigating and testing a hypothesis and its implications are all in agreement and can be easily repeated by another investigator.

5) Conclusion. When a hypothesis and its implications are consistently proven to be accurate by each aspect of investigation and testing, they are considered to be reliable.

As a follower of Christ, we are guided by the ultimate truth of the Scriptures as we work through each step of the scientific method. This enhances our ability to analyze information and determine how to use it. Not only that, we can receive wisdom from the Holy Spirit, as He nudges us through the process as our all-knowing Mentor. Researching the facts does three very important things. First, it proves whether or not we have the truth. Second, it is a discipline that builds patience and restraint in us. And third, it provides opportunities for the Lord to tutor us in the ways of life. Proverbs 25:2 says, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out (#2713) a matter is the glory of kings.” There is nothing quite as satisfying or assuring as doing your homework to make sure your natural and spiritual senses are in sync. When they agree with one another and the Scriptures, you can be much more confident that your facts are reliable and that you are walking in the truth.

But like any method or technique, these things are only effective when they are consistently applied. And even then, they are not a guarantee for avoiding mistakes, only limiting them. Ultimately, it

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

is our dependence upon the Lord's mercy that keeps us on track. The years I spent working in Russia helped me learn some important lessons about the mix of our diligence and God's ultimate grace. Russia was a tough place to do business and we were surrounded by people who were willing to lie, cheat, steal, or extort their way to prosperity, creating a constant pressure to check and double-check facts. So when I received a call from a well-known Christian leader in America who wanted to fund a significant contribution of medicines and equipment to one of our projects, I should have been completely thrilled. I was so weary from battling with unscrupulous people that I hoped his call would provide some welcome relief. But I immediately felt a nudge of caution from the Lord, and my heart sank. I wondered for a moment if I had become paranoid or if there was a problem hidden in this blessing.

The gift would be made through the Christian Helpers Fund (CHF) a humanitarian organization that specialized in medical assistance. From my first moments on the telephone with Stan Tracey, their president, I felt uneasy. He was a fast-talker whose conversation oozed with religious phrases. His demeanor was very unsettling and I knew it probably meant trouble. I sent him my "A" list of the things we needed, figuring that would end our discussions. Two days later he called back saying he was ready to ship. I was so surprised that I questioned him about several of the items. We badly needed help, but sometimes the expense of shipping and handling was more than the gift was worth. He brashly reminded me that I was dealing with the CHF and reeled off a list of impressive credentials. I was still troubled, so I made a couple of calls to see what I could discover. Since everyone I spoke with had only wonderful things to say about the CHF, I decided to put my misgivings aside.

I waited anxiously for the report of the shipment's arrival in St. Petersburg and when the fax finally came my heart started pounding. "My Dear Brother in Christ," it started. "In anticipation of the arrival of the container, we arranged for a delegation of city and church officials and news media to attend the opening. We are sorry to report that the contents of the container are unusable. The equipment is faulty and the medicines are expired. It has caused a

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

great uproar and embarrassment.” I was so angry with myself I could barely think. I was in the middle of an international public relations disaster and my mind was racing with thoughts of what I should have said or done. By most people’s standards, I had used reasonable judgment. But I hadn’t completely lost that uneasy feeling, and I knew that I should have continued my due diligence until I either got rid of it or found out why it was there.

I flew to St. Petersburg to see the shipment for myself. It was abominable. There was not a single piece of equipment that was usable. It was literal junk and some of the medicines were so old they had crystals growing in them. I made a detailed report and took pictures of every item. Then I got on the phone to complete the work I should have done before I accepted the shipment. This time I asked the right questions and all the responses were negative. Several people told me of similar experiences with the CHF. What Stan Tracey did, and was well-known for by both recipients and competitors, was called “creaming.” He sent really good things to high-profile destinations where he was sure they would receive great publicity. The leftovers were sent to what he hoped were obscure or politically unsophisticated recipients. One person even told me how the CHF shipped snow shovels to Jamaica.

His scheme was to appear to be the most efficient provider of humanitarian support measured by dollars per pound delivered. One good shipment and one shipment of junk divided his actual equipment and medicine expenses in half and doubled the reported value of what he actually shipped, leaving his Christian and secular competitors far behind. He had won several humanitarian awards based upon his fraudulent numbers, which he then used as propaganda to raise more funds from unsuspecting supporters. Those who had attempted to protest were successfully labeled as ungrateful recipients or envious competitors, and there had never been a serious investigation.

Stan Tracey seemed unmoved by what I reported to him, as though he knew that he would not be held accountable. He had always depended upon the political and self-preserving nature of the leaders of the institutional church to operate his scam. And, like his competitors, I found widespread reluctance to hold him

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

accountable. The philanthropist who had underwritten the shipment didn't want to be associated with the demise of the CHF, nor smudge his own philanthropic exploits. Another person, who had encouraged me to accept the shipment, was a board member of a major denomination's charity that, on his recommendation, had long supported the CHF. He didn't want to pursue the matter either. Even my list of witnesses, who were privately very frank in describing the CHF's unscrupulous deeds, feared retribution from established members of the humanitarian and Christian communities if they went public. They knew that exposing the CHF could embarrass important people and affect their own efforts to raise funds.

I reported the situation to my Board of Directors and we held a telephone conference to pray together and decide what to do. As we asked the Lord for wisdom and discussed all the facts, our choice became clear. We had a responsibility to be faithful to our work. That meant doing what was right for our partners in Russia, and the poor and elderly we served. We decided to complete our investigation, make our findings known, and trust the Lord to redeem my mistake. It was quite a battle, but we eventually received a letter of apology from the chairperson of the CHF, who removed Stan Tracey from his post in order to avoid serious problems with the IRS and the State Department.

Our management of the incident actually increased our credibility with several international agencies as well as the people of St. Petersburg. Not only that, we caught the attention of the agent for a major pharmaceutical firm. It was someone whose humanitarian career had been mercilessly crushed many years before when he had questioned the value of the CHF's shipments and Stan Tracey's ethics. As a result of our reports, his company contributed millions of dollars in high-grade medicines to our projects each year for several years thereafter. What started out as a disaster had drawn me into a much greater vision and we eventually delivered humanitarian supplies to over one hundred hospitals and clinics.

But I knew in my heart that our success had only been possible because the Lord had squeezed a Romans 8:28 secondary benefit

out of my mess, and caused “all things to work together for good.” It might have been that He was looking for an opportunity to end Stan Tracey’s scheme, and bless our ministry. I don’t know. But I do know that not fully trusting and obeying the gentle urgings of His Spirit could just as easily have ended my ministry to Russia. And there were some situations that came later where ignoring His nudges could have cost me my life. It has been events like this that have caused me to more deeply appreciate being led by the Spirit.

Carefully Examine the Crucial Facts

When I hear someone repeat the phrase “If it walks like a duck . . .” to point out how obvious a fact or someone’s behavior might have been, I am reminded of my first duck hunting experience. Standing in waist deep river water at the break of dawn, with a twelve-gauge shotgun resting across my shoulder, it suddenly occurred to me that I didn’t know what a “flying” duck looked like. Anyone who has hunted knows that birds have very distinctive flight patterns. As I squinted to see through the early morning fog with shards of light occasionally bursting through in a blinding glare, I realized that I did not have enough specific information or experience to be sure of what I was seeing and I had only a split second to decide what was sailing toward me.

Just breaking out of the fog about fifty yards away was what looked like a duck. But I wanted to be sure because my partner was depending upon me to check my portion of the horizon and quietly whisper alerts of oncoming birds. I didn’t want to embarrass myself or shoot a protected bird (a sad mistake that could also carry a very heavy fine) so I waited until the approaching bird flew so close I could see the color of the ring around his neck. Then I impulsively yelled, “DUCK!” It rattled my hunting partner so badly that he swung his shotgun around just as I did and we simultaneously shot a startled mallard that had pulled up suddenly at my shout and exposed himself to two broadside loads of bird-shot at about fifteen feet. There was nothing left but feathers.

This story may sound vaguely familiar to anyone who wishes he hadn’t been too proud or fearful to ask questions and do his homework before he had to make an important decision. Sometimes

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

knowing that something “looks, walks, and sounds like a duck” is enough. But there are clearly times when you will need to know more and have greater confidence in your opinion. For instance, I have never really enjoyed Christian T.V. all that much. When I first started viewing its programming I was a new believer and although I didn’t identify with its super-religious and sometimes effeminate-sounding spokesmen, I assumed that they must be legitimate because they claimed such wide support by people of faith. Nonetheless, I often got the “creeps” watching them. For me, that was enough. Since there was no mandate to watch or support them, I didn’t, and as various televangelist scandals unfolded, I realized that my sense about some of them having a “bad spirit” was correct.

A few years later I found myself chairing a continuing forum on “Religion and Public Life” at the Council on Foundations in Washington, D.C. It was an educational and informational forum for foundation executives and we had many requests from our colleagues for a symposium on Christian T.V. Our foundations were regularly besieged by grant requests from broadcasters to support Christian programming and with all of the scandals, there were many unanswered questions about the viability of the medium. Most people would agree that a “few bad apples don’t spoil the whole barrel,” and the industry had continued to expand as believers came to its defense and propped up its faltering following. However, the kind of investments the men and women of the forum were being asked to make required much more detailed information.

The things we learned from the Christian T.V. operators and programmers were quite astounding. Fundamentally, they have such a consistently small audience (two to three percent of the market share in most areas) and such poor demographics (viewers are overwhelmingly women aged fifty or older) that their potential for advertising income, the lifeblood of television, is limited. They usually receive enough purchased air-time, donations from their audience, and “mercy advertising” from Christian businessmen to operate their transmitters, but there is little left for on-air personnel or programming. One of the more successful programmers said it was “like building an automobile factory, but never having enough money to buy materials and actually build automobiles.” The

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

economics of Christian T.V. are amazingly parallel to those of the institutional church in that most of the money received is consumed on maintaining the infrastructure, not furthering the mission agenda.

When you listen to the voices of Christian T.V., especially their fundraisers, they often mention the great positive effects their programs have for the Kingdom. But when you get down to the specifics of their claims, the evidence too often is not there. One on-air minister told me that one hundred people were coming to Christ each day as a result of his broadcasts in just one South American city. Over four years that would be a minimum of one hundred thousand new converts. In most cities, that many new constituents to anything, even hockey, would have a measurable effect on its culture. Interestingly, his claim of one hundred thousand new converts was being used to raise two hundred thousand dollars for new equipment, so we challenged him to make an on-air appeal to raise a dollar from each of their new constituents, which could then be matched by major contributors. The broadcaster asserted that the people were too poor to send in a dollar, even though “prosperity” was one of his major themes!

Another significant measure of performance that is often touted by Christian T.V. fund raisers is the number of households their signal “reaches.” The listener might assume that he or she is talking about how many families are actually watching. In fact, that term really refers to the number of households who have the option of turning on their programming via local broadcast or cable. I’m sure one hundred thousand households reached by a signal sounds much more impressive to potential contributors than three thousand viewing households, especially when the production costs per viewer are considered. But it is not an accurate measure of its audience. Although some Christian T.V. stations do not subscribe to the Nielsen ratings, they are the industry standard. In one case where I needed to evaluate a broadcaster, I contacted someone with access to the Nielsen ratings for all the stations in his area. To my surprise his programs were viewed by only seven-tenths of one percent (.007%) of the households his signal reached.

Whether we are evaluating the pro’s and con’s of a decision to be made, trying to reconcile the conflicting stories of an inter-

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

personal conflict, or checking out the reliability of someone's testimony, the facts that might be pivotal or strategic must be placed into their proper context or explained fully enough that their correct meaning is conveyed. This standard is consistent with both the previously mentioned Hebrew word *chaqar* (#2713, to examine intimately, search, and explore) and the Greek word *anakrino* (#350) which similarly requires us "to inquire, investigate, interrogate, question, examine, or discern in the forensic sense of a judge examining an accused and witnesses." The pursuit of the truth might involve careful research and study, as in the example of the Bereans, who are described in Acts 17:11 to have "examined (#350) the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true," or questioning a person to get at the facts as in Acts 24:8 where the Jews accused Paul of wrongdoing and suggested to Felix that, "By examining (#350) him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him."

A wise older man once exhorted me to be careful not to "leave my brain at the door" when I had dealings with "church leaders." It was good advice because they are not always what they appear to be, or even think they are. Not that they intentionally lie or manipulate the facts—although it does happen. But sometimes they are so affected by the culture of the institutional church that they fall prey to spiritual dishonesty. In other words, they may begin to believe that "the end justifies the means" or become influenced by a bribe. Deuteronomy 16:19 says, "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous." A bribe is a "gift or reward." It can come in the form of a donation, a personal gift, affirmation, or acceptance. One of the most powerful bribes that a man can receive is being publicly commended for his loyalty. With absolutely no money changing hands some men can be compromised by a simple complement or even the affection of a woman.

An example of how entangled these things can become is the case of Pastor Boulter and the Golden Clock. Pastor Boulter was an honest man who had left a successful sales career to pursue the ministry. Although he was a dynamic speaker he was ill-equipped, as most men are, to fulfill the institutional church's role of Pastor-

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

Teacher-CEO. However, he was so driven to be successful in the ministry that he refused to recognize his inability to fulfill all of the roles required of him. Instead of rejecting the faulty design of both the institutional church and his job description, he kept pushing himself to become the person he mistakenly thought God had asked him to become. However, like most men who have tried to press themselves into the mold of the institutional church, he began to surrender to organizational pressures and personal insecurities. Before long, he became aware of some criticism of his leadership and began to overreact to any hint of disunity, often arguing strongly to convince his congregation of the God-inspired nature of his vision for their future. Eventually, his reputation for personal integrity began to disintegrate as he sacrificed the need for unvarnished truth to maintain unity for various church-growth programs he had begun.

Professor Steck, the bearer of the Golden Clock, was a world-renowned manager who had retired to enjoy the fruits of his many business exploits and teach aspiring young businessmen how to succeed. He had become a follower of Christ very late in life and used his wealth to engage in various philanthropic endeavors. Like his keen business insight, his generosity was a genuine expression of his gifting and personality and he enjoyed widespread acclaim for his good deeds. He had become a member of Pastor Boulter's congregation at about the time they were beginning a new building program, a fact which Pastor Boulter considered to be an expression of God's blessing on his plans. But Professor Steck had serious personal problems that had brought his decades-long marriage to the brink of divorce. His compulsive interest in young women's breasts and his reluctance to become a whole-hearted disciple of Christ had led to many conflicts with his wife. He eventually turned to a young female assistant for solace, complaining that his wife demanded too much time be spent in prayers and Bible reading. But he wanted to feel justified in his actions and finally sought counsel from the church.

So there they were, Pastor Boulter and Professor Steck, each needing the other's approval to complete their agenda, and both deceived by the various fleshly impulses at work in their lives. If either of them had used his skills and experience to question the

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

other's values, objectives, or rationales, there might not have been an ill-advised building program, or a whitewashed divorce. But instead they spoke superficially about the matters, each achieving tacit approval from the other, while avoiding any legitimate responsibilities they had toward one another in Christ. In appreciation for Pastor Boulter's supportive counsel, Professor Steck presented him with a solid gold desk clock inscribed with his name. Both of their agendas eventually led to chaotic ends, in no small way influenced by their reluctance to examine one another's testimony. Pastor Boulter's congregation became divided over his decisions, leading to his dismissal and great confusion in the community. Professor Steck married his assistant and moved on to a new church, their consciences silenced by Pastor Boulter's approval and the aura of their good deeds. It was just like the adulteress in Proverbs 30:20, "She eats and wipes her mouth and says, 'I've done nothing wrong.'"

To those who knew about it, the Golden Clock was a bribe. But it was just a commemorative of the real bribe, which was the tacit approval each man gave to the other's goals. It's essential to understand the influence of a bribe on every kind of communication or transaction and not to underestimate its potential for invading even the most sacred venues. In a world that considers "spin" an acceptable business skill, constant vigilance is required. That's why some followers of Christ yearn to leave the business world to pursue a life in the "ministry," thinking they can avoid the corruption of working among unredeemed men. Unfortunately, even in the church, the facts are often skewed to misrepresent the truth. So each person must remain diligent to ask questions and investigate even simple matters to make sure they are reliable. If you are a discerning person who is diligent to seek out the facts, the truth is usually there for you to see. If not, the truth is still there, it's just of no benefit to you.

Test the Validity of Every Doctrine

When I first became a follower of Christ, I heard someone refer to the Bible as the "planet earth operations manual." The guy who made the comment was a scientist who was expressing his

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

appreciation for how easy it is to test ideas and philosophies when you have the Bible as a standard. It was simple for him because he was a person who constantly tested facts using the scientific method. He was not biased by what he wanted the truth to be. He was completely focused on getting it right so he could serve the Lord the way He wants to be served. He conscientiously pursued the truth and was quick to question any strange theories or doctrines that a speaker might espouse. Although his questions created some embarrassing situations for some of the super-religious people he came in contact with, they were a perfectly legitimate expression of accountability, and something that each of us ought to be doing. The Apostle Peter warned us about the perpetrators of false doctrines saying:

There will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

2 Peter 2:1-3

It's clear from this warning that there are people whose bad motives drive them to say things that are completely inconsistent with the Scriptures. But the people who have heard and believed the doctrines of false teachers and spread them like a virus throughout the body of Christ can be just as troubling. Being sincerely deceived, they have usually not taken the time, nor put forth the effort, to prove or disprove what they have heard, but zealously press their viewpoint wherever they go. Finding the proper balance between not being intimidated by such people and not being drawn into a worthless debate by their aggressive manner is a difficult thing to learn and one which I had to confront early in my ministry.

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

I had just finished baptizing the last of several new followers of Christ and was enjoying a time of fellowship and celebration with their family and friends. I was standing in the corner of the host's living room talking to several older men when I noticed a woman walking briskly toward us with a rather determined look on her face. To my surprise she walked right up to me, interrupted our conversation, and with a shrill tone said, "Brother Kennedy, do you realize the mistake you made when you baptized these people today?" I was startled and thought at first that she might be making some sort of joke, but I could tell by the way the men suddenly backed away that she was very serious. So I answered simply, "No ma'am. What did I do wrong?" She pointed her finger in my face and said "You didn't baptize them in Jesus' name!" I thought for a moment trying to recall what I had done. Then I said, "Yes ma'am, I did. I baptized them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Son, you know, and I'm sure that counts."

What a mistake! By indulging myself in a little frivolity I had only provoked her to further bickering. "No!" she screamed, "I mean *only* in Jesus' name, like the Apostle Peter instructed us to do in Acts 2:38." Then she rambled on for two or three minutes about some vague revelations she had received about water baptism. She finished by saying, "So you see you disobeyed what Peter told us to do!" I was perturbed by her loud insistence, which had by then severely dampened our celebration, so I said, "Well you can obey Peter if you want, but I am going to obey Jesus' command from Matthew 28:19 and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." She looked like she might explode, but before she could get started again, I said firmly but respectfully, "O.K. lady, that's enough." She jumped back as though someone had punched her in the gut. When she recovered, she spun around and stormed out of the house.

That was one of my first head-on collisions with a religious zealot. The lady sincerely believed that her legalistic, hair-splitting revelations about water baptism had come supernaturally; and I think she was right. They probably had come supernaturally, but not from God. That kind of divisive nit-picking is specifically condemned in several passages such as Titus 3:9, which says, "Avoid

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.” Sadly, whole denominations have been built on such controversies, with various groups thinking baptism or communion or some other essential should be done this way or that to be valid. My objective here is not to argue about the details, but to demonstrate how problematic some of these “doctrines” can become and how they can take on a life of their own.

When someone incorrectly believes that he has a “revelation from God,” it is very difficult to convince him of his error, even when the Scriptures are clear on the topic. The more supernatural and untested the revelation, the more vulnerable people are to being misled. You might be surprised to know that some of the world’s well-known institutional religions started as a result of a “revelation” or a “visit from an angel.” And each new religion modified the basic covenant and doctrines of Jesus Christ.

In 1827, Joseph Smith started the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or Mormons, on the basis of a visit from “a heavenly messenger named Moroni,” who said that in mortal life he had been both a prophet and the son of a prophet. His father was named “Mormon.” They were supposedly Nephite’s, a branch of the House of Israel that had inhabited the American continent prior to Columbus. They created the Book of Mormon and also some new rituals such as baptizing the dead members of a family into Christ (lds.org).

The Islamic religion was founded by Mohammed, who said he received a series of visits and revelations from the angel “Gabriel” during the period of 610 - 632 A.D. With over a billion adherents, Islamic believers say Jesus was only a prophet (worldbookonline.com).

And once again, we must mention Constantine. In 312 A.D., prior to a final attack on Rome (at Milvian Bridge on the Tiber river), he attempted to consult pagan gods for guidance. He typically used diviners who acted as his intermediary and relied upon their ability to inspect and interpret the entrails of sacrificed animals as the basis for their predictions. Although it had been Constantine’s custom to call on these pagan gods for assistance, he was apparently

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

unable to engage them in this particular endeavor. However, he had a vision, or a dream, or a visit from an angel (history is divided on exactly what) in which he saw a bright light and the “monogram of Jesus Christ.” He supposedly spoke to “the Christ of God” who assured him of success in battle if he would inscribe the monogram on his soldier’s shields. In return for victory, Constantine promised to institutionalize Christianity by making it a state religion. There is no record of this monogram prior to Constantine, or of his personal testimony acknowledging Jesus as the Lord of his life. In fact, he apparently continued his contacts with diviners and pagan gods while serving as both the head of the church and the head of state. (See Appendix)

In Galatians 1:8 the Apostle Paul warned us that, “even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” Notwithstanding this admonition, Constantine’s design for the church has been revered for centuries. His “vision” provided the platform for the abuses that Luther confronted, and has remained as the acknowledged framework of the institutional church. The lessons to be learned are very simple: No matter how good it may sound (and Constantine’s vision might have been very appealing to a persecuted church), deviations from the basic scriptural pattern have consequences. And the channels through which they come should never surprise us. “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

There are two fundamental and strategic characteristics of false doctrine: First, it separates us from God and one another, dividing the body of Christ and diminishing its power. Jesus said, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand” (Matthew 12:25). And second, it is the devil’s tool to damage or destroy the life of every individual and God’s plan for them. Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

Nothing is more divisive than denominational doctrine. Denominations actually take pride in emphasizing the special

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

scriptural distinctive that sets them apart from each other. But they are quite simply dividing the Body of Christ among themselves and in the process slicing up the Bible and rejecting parts of the personality of God. I have attended many inter-denominational ministerial meetings where they tried to find unity in Christ while preserving their individual distinctions. It's like calling together an embattled family to help them find a peaceful common ground without resolving their important differences. Actually, they were just being polite and putting forth the appearance of unity as they privately clung to the tenets of the institutional franchises that held each of them captive. Nothing changes at those meetings even though the ministers return to their pulpits with dynamic stories about the body of Christ unifying.

When a new denomination or local congregation is formed around a doctrinal viewpoint, it usually represents either a failure to reconcile scriptural differences with a previous group, or a new revelation that supports one viewpoint over another. The problem with this very polite way of describing divisions is that someone lacked the humility and honesty to submit to the scriptural truth and commit to real reconciliation. My wife was once a member of a sorority that had a very interesting motto they invoked when there were conflicts in their local chapters. It was called "branch and grow" which was a euphemism for "leave those folks behind and start a new chapter." When you have been conditioned to think of the Kingdom of God as the sum of its institutions, there are very few options available but to "branch and grow," dragging along some of the confused and divided members of the body of Christ with you.

In all of my studies I have never found a Scripture that could be accurately and reasonably interpreted several ways. When the Hebrew or Greek text and literal context are considered along with any parallel Scriptures on the topic, there is always one very clear and overwhelming meaning. The more essential the Scripture is to life and godliness, the more easily and consistently it can be interpreted. It's amazing how effortlessly correct doctrine passes the common-sense test. When there is a serious debate with significant differences over what a Scripture means, it usually

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

indicates that someone is holding on to a doctrinal position that requires some stretching and straining to explain.

It's dangerous to make Scriptures say what you want them to mean even when doing so sounds harmless. I remember one teacher who liked to encourage older people who were losing their memory by quoting a portion of Proverbs 10:7 which says, "The memory of the righteous is blessed." I'm sure his listeners were encouraged until they read the whole Scripture, which says, "The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot." The meaning of the Scripture had been changed from how our lives are remembered by others to a trite application of false faith in our ability to remember things.

We are called to be responsible members of the family of God, not the local franchise of a denomination or the followers of a charismatic personality perpetuating false doctrine. As the Apostle Paul said,

My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul;' another, 'I follow Apollos;' another, 'I follow Cephas;' still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?

1 Corinthians 1:11-13

Doctrinal mistakes can have very destructive implications which are easily discernable by anyone willing to look honestly at the facts. One afternoon my assistant called to describe a counseling situation that had been going on most of the morning. A volunteer counselor had been unsuccessful in convincing a young woman to renounce her commitment to "Krishna" and give up drugs, and they wanted me to spend a few minutes with her before she left. She had apparently been a follower of this religion for some time and had since turned to drugs supposedly to expand her mind and find peace. She was thin and emaciated. Her hair was dirty and snarled and she had the general appearance of a homeless person. I was surprised to

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

learn that she was a University student who had a job and an apartment.

As her counselor described the conversations they had been having, the young woman constantly interrupted her saying things like “Krishna is Lord, Krishna is wonderful, I love Krishna.” She was clearly defensive and although she was in a drug induced state, was in control of her faculties to the point that she could make specific assertions when she wanted to argue a point. I recognized that she was not close to considering a change in her life, so I asked the counselor if she had a mirror in her pocketbook. She dug one out and I handed it to the young woman and asked her to look into it for a moment. Then I said, “It’s clear that you are devoted to Krishna. I just wanted you to see what a great job he is doing.” She looked up at me with fire in her eyes. “No, really,” I said, “If that’s your idea of a good life, fine, but when you’ve had enough, I suggest you give up this foolishness and become a follower of Christ.” Late that night in the loneliness of her apartment, the truth sank deep into her heart. She decided enough was enough and gave her life to Christ in a transforming moment.

The influence of false doctrine is not limited to groups we traditionally consider to be cults. When any institution’s doctrine limits the power of God in your life and draws your affection away from Christ to itself, it is as much the tool of the devil as any cult. Like this young woman, each of us should judge doctrine by examining its effect on our life. “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3).

Follow the Facts to Their Spiritual Source

Keeping ourselves free from false doctrine or just fulfilling our responsibilities at home and at work requires wisdom. Remember, the dictionary defines wisdom as “knowledge of what is true or right coupled with good judgment.” Jesus knew we would need someone to provide us with an occasional “word of wisdom” or “word of knowledge” (1 Corinthians 12:8 NAS) to help us understand the facts we have before us, nudge us toward the facts we need, or decide on a course of action, so He promised the help

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:26, He said, “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all (#3956, every manner, means, and way of) things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

There have been many times that I have thought about the next step to take in investigating a matter or how to advise a client, when the Holy Spirit would bring to my mind just the stimulus I needed to ask a question, make a call, or pull up some records that would reveal important facts. He has been so personally involved in helping me find the truth and gently guiding me to what I needed to see or hear, that sometimes His thoughts have become my own without my realizing it until I asked what I thought was a casual question that went right to the heart of a matter. The Holy Spirit has also directed me through the steps of the scientific method, quietly impressing me with an alternative hypothesis to check out before I got myself into trouble. Then there are the times when I have reflexively known not to do something, or felt reluctant to become involved with someone only to later discover facts that proved the wisdom of my choice. In each case, He has trained me to use all of my intellect and senses, but to ultimately depend upon His guidance. His will is to do the Father’s will, just as ours should be. That’s why He becomes so involved in helping us when we are trying to obey the Lord.

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

1 Corinthians 2:11-12

Behind every motive, thought, or behavior there is a spirit that is human, demonic, or holy. Holy motives, thoughts, and behaviors are consistent with God’s Word and bring us into closer fellowship with Him. Demonic motives, thoughts, and behaviors draw us away from God and His ways, often disguising themselves with

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

good deeds and false doctrine. When we see a drug addict who has committed crimes to support his habit, we can easily accept the fact that he has been captured by demonic motives, thoughts, and behaviors. But what about the pastor who eloquently preaches an “inspired” sermon that draws us toward the institutional church, and then afterward meets his girlfriend for a rendezvous? Is he any less captured by demonic motives, thoughts, and behaviors than the drug addict? Or what about the follower of Christ who has spent his life loyally supporting and defending the actions of the institutional church? Are all of his motives, thoughts, and behaviors holy or is there some mixture?

The devil wants to entangle believers in demonic motives and make us unable to fulfill the commands of God. He accomplishes this by tempting us at the point of our fleshly desires and manipulating our will. Demonic manipulation cost Samson his physical power (Judges 16:4-31), Solomon his kingdom (1 Kings 11:1-13), and caused King Herod to have John the Baptist beheaded (Mark 6:17-29). Using subtle temptations and thoughts, demonic powers try to seduce and entrap all good men and corrupt their ways. We are tempted at the place of our greatest desires for security, identity, and belonging; or drawn away from our devotion to Christ into proud things like crusading and battling, coveting power or reform, leading the great project, or simply the pursuit of sexual gratification. Demonic manipulation causes us to misuse our strength and talents following after the things of this world or religion, diverting the energy and resources of the Kingdom of God to perverted purposes.

Over twenty years ago a federal investigator I had led to the Lord told me about the insidious nature of white-collar crime and how often it is connected to what he called “church people.” I had spent an entire evening on stake-out with him watching known criminals go into and out of the offices of a deacon in one of the local churches, and trying to convince him how wrong he was to believe this was anything but a rarity. He laughed at my naive lack of knowledge and eventually used me as an operative where I got to see first hand how much money and raw power was involved, and how commonly and without challenge, it reached into the church

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

for legitimacy. Years later, I was thinking about those things as I raised my right hand and promised to tell the truth to a grand jury investigator. As I took my seat, the bizarre nature of the moment rushed over me. I was about to testify to what I had inadvertently learned about a fellow believer's business practices, and the research I had conducted to discover the facts.

I had been doing some consulting work for a government official when one of the people I interviewed handed me a file with detailed information about corrupt contracting practices in his agency. The man providing the information knew that I was a believer and when he handed me the file he said in a gruff voice, "When you get into this one you will get to see what Bill Walden has been doing." I was stunned because Bill Walden was someone whom I considered to be a friend. He was also a pastor, and the facts in that file connected him, either knowingly or unknowingly, to some key players in a white-collar crime syndicate.

Pastor Walden's possible involvement in fraud and corruption had caused me to spend some significant time in prayer asking the Lord for guidance. As the Lord brought to mind several incidents over the years, I was impressed to call one or more of our mutual friends and ask some probing questions. For instance, I had once gone to Pastor Walden when I had heard his marriage was in trouble. I had challenged him to be faithful to his marriage covenant and work out his differences with his wife. As I thought back over that visit, I remembered the eerie little smile that crept across his face several times during our talk. So I asked someone who would know if he had ever suspected Pastor Walden of adultery. He laughed and said, "Which time?" He went on to tell me several stories of which he had irrefutable knowledge of Pastor Walden's infidelity over a period of twenty years. The same thing happened each time I made a call and for each topic that was relevant. It happened that several men knew of his corrupt lifestyle.

The amazing thing to me was how much some of these men knew and how long they had known it. I asked each one why he had not shared any of this with anyone prior to my call. Almost without variance they each described a failed attempt to confront him and how he had defied accountability by a number of other

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

men. Their confused doctrines had trapped them between Pastor Walden's lack of accountability and what they thought was their obligation to protect the Gospel from ridicule. Pastor Walden had always made a big issue out of loyalty. He surrounded himself with good men who had one major flaw. They would be loyal to him no matter what they saw or heard, leaving him plenty of room to avoid accountability. A loyal person keeps his mouth shut, does what he's told, and ignores the inconsistencies. It was clear that Pastor Walden and I approached relationships from two very different perspectives. His was a religious world that demanded blind loyalty, while mine required me to think about how to express faithfulness and personal accountability in each situation.

Before I had an opportunity to sit down with him personally and share my concerns about what I had discovered, I received a call from special agent Foster, "inviting" me to be questioned under oath. In this situation, being faithful to the Lord required me to dig deep to be sure of my information, which I had done. It also required me to tell the truth about what I knew, if asked. Additionally, it also required me to go to my brother and discuss what I had found and give him the opportunity to accept responsibility and repent, or deny the corrupt nature of his involvement. When I finished my testimony, the investigators said I could not disclose the nature or topics of their interview with me. I agreed with one caveat. I had already told them about my relationship with Pastor Walden and so I explained to them how I had a responsibility to go to him as a brother. I promised to use only that information which I had already discovered.

When I met with him, he systematically lied about important facts, trying to convince me that he was not capable of such guile. But I was very well prepared and had thoroughly checked out the essential elements of his story. Had I not done so, he could have very convincingly confused the issues and put me on a guilt trip. We kept talking and he finally trapped himself behind the conflicting logic of his lies. When I pointed out the frailty of his arguments, he abruptly changed his tone and angrily said, "I don't owe you or anyone else an explanation. It's my business." Finally, he had spoken

PERCEPTUAL CLARITY

the sad truth. His hardened resistance was clear evidence of the controlling spiritual source in his life. His friends and colleagues had given him many opportunities to repent. But he had chosen to take refuge in a deceived life of corruption and self-indulgence.

After I discovered that Pastor Walden's controlling spiritual source was demonic, it was much easier to understand the significance of things I had seen and heard over the years and dismissed as idiosyncrasies, even though they were sinful. Behind his occasional off-color joke and inappropriate language was a man who was deeply involved in sexual sin. Behind his defense of the institutional doctrine of loyalty to spiritual authority was a man who controlled people like slaves. Behind his infatuation with the symbols of wealth and power was a man who had established a demonic covenant with a syndicate of white-collar criminals. Had I not stumbled across irrefutable facts that were too difficult to rationalize, I might never have followed the trail of evidence in his life to its logical source. But looking back it was clear. Here was a man who had yielded his life to the manipulating power of demonic temptation.

Almost anyone who has been surprised by the public scandal of a trusted friend or church leader can think back to see how the Holy Spirit tried to show them the inconsistencies in the person's life or ministry long before it became public. It is often the subtle "distinguishing (#1253, *diakrisis*) between spirits" (1 Corinthians 12:10) that tells us that something is wrong with a person's spiritual source. The Greek word *diakrisis* literally means, "to make a judicial estimation, or to discern or judge." It is related to *diakrino* (#1252) which is "a process of separating the facts thoroughly, and deciding mentally or judicially." These scriptural standards and my personal experiences have proven to me that wisdom from the Lord about the spirit behind a person's behaviors always connects to a specific set of facts. They are facts that will unfold before us if we simply pursue the truth. I believe this is why the Apostle Paul asked the question in 1 Corinthians 6:5, "Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge (#1252) a dispute between believers?" After all:

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell? It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed even from the birds of the air. Destruction and Death say, 'Only a rumor of it has reached our ears.' God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells, for he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When he established the force of the wind and measured out the waters, when he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm, then he looked at wisdom and appraised it; he confirmed it and tested it. And he said to man, 'The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'

Job 28:20-28