



Loyal To All That's True, Yet Loving Towards All People Too

By Kurt von Schleicher

**Is Criticism Always Wrong?
Are The Messages From 'God's Anointed' Beyond All Critique?**

Untouchables, Elliot Ness Was One Of Them, But Ministers... Are They Supposed To Be Beyond The Evaluation Of Their Hearers?

It was after a church service one morning in which the preacher minister had preached on spiritual gifts, that he was greeted at the door by a lady who said, "Pastor, I believe I have the gift of criticism." The pastor looked at her and asked, "Remember the person in Jesus' parable who had the one talent?" The woman nodded to express her understanding. "Do you recall what he did with it?" "Yes," replied the lady, "he went out and buried it." The pastor suggested, "Go, thou, and do likewise!"

Today, as in Jesus day, we know that it's the religionists who are negatively critical. Pharisees seem to be the same yesterday, today and forever. They just love rules, laws, dead traditions, money, applause and rituals more than people and more than simple relationship with God through Christ. They still call more things sin than the Scriptures call sin, and they also call more things righteous than the Bible does. They have made the way to God difficult and complicated (by works that they don't even keep), while Jesus has made it—for all people—simple and easy... through repentance and trusting Him alone.

Yep, the Pharisees and Sadducees apparently felt they too had the gift of criticism. Frequently they attempted to ensnare the Lord Jesus. And as was our Master's habit, Jesus entered Jerusalem, crossing the Mount of Olives; and *"early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?'* This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear" (Jn. 8:2-6).

Jesus' reappearance in the temple provided an opportunity for the Pharisees and Scribes to lay a subtle snare for Him and you know they wouldn't pass it by. They brought him a woman taken in the very act of adultery. The Feast of Tabernacles had just been celebrated, and acts of immorality during that festive

week were not unusual. Using this female pawn, the scribes attempted to put Christ in a dilemma by quoting the law of Moses. **They knew that if He answered that the woman should be stoned, He would violate the Roman law, which forbade such acts. However, if Jesus answered that the woman should not be stoned, He would be violating Moses' law** (Deut. 22:24).

Of course the religious leaders were not so much interested in the adulterous woman as they were in Jesus' response to her situation. Their criticism of her was motivated by their desire to entrap Him. But Christ knew all too well how to repel such attacks by appealing to higher principles. The same law that adjudicated the woman guilty enough to be stoned to death also required the witnesses to cast the first stones. Jesus' statement, "**He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her**" (vs. 7), was sure to bring an end to their criticism. The crowd, one by one, stealthily left the scene. Prayerfully meditate on John 8:1-32 and see how intensely critical these religionists were. All through His ministry on earth, they were the ones that consistently gave Christ the hardest time. Ironically the only one who was left was the Lord Jesus, the only one in the crowd who had lived a perfect life and had a right to condemn her.

This very teaching is reiterated by the Apostle Paul in Romans eight. Paul asks the hypothetical questions, "**What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?... who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us**" (Rom. 8:31, 33-34). Only the mind of God could conceive of a plan whereby the one person who lived a righteous life and had the right to condemn us was the very person who laid down that life to die for us. The woman taken in adultery was speaking to the one who did not come into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world.

There's a very successful businessman who keeps a fairly large stone on his desk. The stone is mounted and lettered with one word: "First." This acts as a constant reminder to him of Jesus' words, "**He that is without sin . . . let him first cast a stone.**" When his employees enter his office and there is reason to criticize them for their lack of achievement, the man looks at the stone and recalls his own shortcomings. He wisely chooses to deal with his employees in mercy and grace. *Clearly this passage of Scripture does not teach us to look the other way when people sin. It does not teach us that we ought to condone adultery or any other crime. What it does teach us, however, is that it is not the responsibility of a Christian continually to be on the lookout for sin in other Christians—or anyone else for that matter.*

If we have lived a perfect life, we can be watchdogs on others who have not lived a perfect life. But we have enough trouble keeping ourselves in line; **we need not constantly be critical of the way others live. Truly it takes more discernment to see the positive things in people's lives than the negative things.** Jesus, (whose sermon content was always flawless) was attempting to teach the critical religious leaders of His day that although the woman was a great sinner, she was no greater a sinner than they were. Sin is sin and we must always remember that. In fact, in this verse Jesus said to them, "**He that is without sin among you, let him...**" the word for "sin" here is different than the normal word for sin (ἡμαρτανο | μεανιγγ: to miss the mark). This word for sin is αναμαρτε | τοσ in the Greek, making the sentence mean, "He that is **without the same sin...**"

Often times criticism can be very sinful, leading to rebellion and unnecessary division. Christians should respect the leaders that God has given them, "**Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you**" (Heb. 13:17). Theirs is the task of assisting the church in its spiritual growth and doctrinal understanding. "**And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets,**

some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:11-16).

Now Let’s Look At The Positive Side Of Critique, Or Fair Criticism

Pharisees, man, they weren’t *fair you see* (their type still isn’t), but I want you to know from the get go, that God is absolutely fair! I’d say He’s the fairest of ten thousand! And we need to be like Him, **“Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the LORD are true; each one is fair”** (Ps. 19:9 NLT). **“The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether”** (KJV). **“Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments”** (Rev. 16:7). **“HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS”** (19:2)!

God wants Christians to be fair in judging! Yes, in opposition to what many Christians think, God wants us to make some careful observations—every day! And Christians especially need to evaluate the teachings of so called “ministers of Christ,” even though we are never to judge their hearts or motives!

God is the only one who can see the internal condition of the heart. But if we as believers aren’t aware that false teachers will arise among the Christian fold we are in danger. **“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood”** (Acts 20:28). **“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed”** (2 Pet. 2:1-2 NKJV). These words make it imperative for us to thoroughly test *all* things by Scripture, as the Bereans did. **“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true”** (Acts 17:11 NIV). The Bereans didn’t hear *high-profile-Paul* or Silas protest, “Hey, wait a minute! Are you actually questioning the revelatory message the Lord gave me in prayer?” Paul and Silas were happy!

The Bible is useful not only for preaching, teaching, and encouragement, but for correcting and rebuking (2 Tim. 4:2). In fact, Christians are held accountable for proclaiming the whole counsel (or will) of God and warning others of false teachings and teachers (Acts 20:26-28; cf. Ezek. 33:7-9; 34:1-10).

We would do well to heed Scripture's repeated warnings to be on guard for false teachings (e.g., Rom. 16:17-18; cf. 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 4:16; 2 Tim. 1:13-14; Tit. 1:9; 2:1), and to point them out to other believers (2 Tim. 4:6). With so much scriptural support, such actions can hardly be considered unbiblical.

SHOULDN'T WE THROW OUT ALL CRITISIZING?

PREACHER-HATING AND MINISTRY-CRITISIZING RUNS RAMPANT TODAY!

Untouchables... Again, Elliot Ness Was One Of Them, But Are Christians? Is Criticism Always Wrong? Are The Messages From 'God's Anointed' Beyond Critique? I have found that as we go out witnessing on the streets, we are seeing more and more people today who have been let down by ministries and preachers. These people, who feel disillusioned by gospel-greed and the glorification of self in pulpits across this nation, are turning to new age gurus by the droves. And we all know that though there are a lot of great churches around, many of their complaints about charlatans in the Church are valid, so we need to be sensitive without becoming cynical ourselves.

A Charismatic pastor friend I've talked to, who has 30,000 people come through his doors every week, told me, "A sure sign of a false prophet is gospel-greed." Then he quoted, "*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you*" (2 Pet. 2:1-3, emphasis mine).

I heard about one brother who received a letter in the mail from a prominent para-church ministry that was actually addressed to his mom. The only thing funny about it was that his mom had been dead for two years—"Dear Ida," it read, "The Lord gave me your name in prayer this morning and you've been on my heart all day today. He's saying it's time for us to pull out all the stops, as together we reach out to more and more desperate people. You see, The Lord would have me say to you that He wants to really bless you financially, as you give the largest gift you possibly can. A thousand dollars is what I'm hearing in my Spirit. And my earnest prayer to God is that He would really multiply your seed sown. Yes, I want to ask you to pray and give—as a partner helping to evangelize—by sowing the largest seed you can. Then I want you to expect a miracle breakthrough! And for your thousand-dollar gift, I personally want to send you an anointed prayer cloth with an imprint of my hand on it. I can feel the healing-heat in my hand at this moment as I write to you. I promise that God will use this cloth to break the yoke... But remember this is a very crucial time of year and unless you give today we could go off the air... The secret is in the sending, so act now."

Personally I don't understand why any decent minister would want the markings of a false prophet on their ministry, but so many do. Herr Johan Tetsil, one of the Pope's underling teachers on assignment in Germany used to proclaim, "*Every time a coin in the coffer clings, another soul from purgatory springs.*" And you know the story how Martin Luther was very outspoken in protesting this gospel-greed. Martin had been in the Word of God and it changed him radically! Tetsil and others were selling lots of expensive indulgences for the sake of the Pope building St. Peter's Cathedral. And flagrantly immoral people were buying them as a non-stop ticket to heaven, in spite of their lack of faith or repentance. That's how many of the churches were built then. But this teaching of purgatory of course is not biblical. Teaching on purgatory says Christ's atonement wasn't sufficient. Sometimes today I wonder if some of the mega-ministries and Christian TV networks have become modern day Cathedrals of sorts, with their overemphasis on money, even employing alleged gifts of the Spirit regarding that \$1000 gift you're to send them for a blessing. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, but it seems the religious Tetsils are too.

Heresy is giving people non-nutritional teaching that hurts them, when deep inside they are hungry for nutritional teaching that helps them. Listen, you can not love God at all if you do not love His truth! Knowledge can puff up with no Bible application, but our aim isn't to study truth as an end in itself—for the sake of merely knowing truth—we have a threefold purpose in it. We are committed to 1.) Worshiping Jesus better, 2.) Tactfully winning souls and 3.) Sensitive equipping the saints to minister to God, saints and sinners.

When people are making important life-decisions, and are hungry for the truth, the false teacher is the one who gives them doctrine that's not only contrary to the Bible, but it's opposite to what they really need. And Listen, they'll use enough truth mixed in to sell Christians on their special revelation. ***"The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well"*** (Prov. 14:15). False teaching is *coming to a church near you!* Are you ready to deal with it? But how can we detect these false teachers among the other Christian teachers? Simple. Know the Word well!

We Christians are likened to sheep that follow each other. The carnal say, *"Come after me—it's not baa-aaa-aad."* But Jesus never said follow My people, He said follow Me. The devil wants us to act on our emotions, but God wants us to think things through. You've seen statements in the Bible like, ***"These things you did not consider"*** (Isa. 47:7), or ***"She did not consider her future. Therefore she has fallen astonishingly; She has no comforter"*** (Lam. 1:9). We need to weigh all things, and think about the consequences of our choices. Two times in the book of Haggai we read, ***"Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Consider your ways!'"*** (1:5 + 7).

Right now, a respectable church personality who's ministry takes in the big bucks, comes to my mind. He has authored some bestsellers that teach some good things, but actually contradict ten basic doctrines of our historic faith. (Like me, have you ever felt someone should post a sign over the entry way of many Christian bookstores and TV shows reading, "Check It Out But At Your Own Risk"). As of late though, several Christians have been asking me if this former chairman of the Practical Theology Department at Talbot School of Theology (a good school) has become a false teacher? And the answer in one sense is yes and in another sense it's no. Like so many, this guy mixes sound theology with horrifically bad doctrines.

Take a moment and examine some erroneous quotes (that I've got on tape) from some of the most popular Christian televangelists of this decade. My wife, Liney, and I have personally encountered all these preachers who made these statement below—they are still on powerful, nationwide Christian television networks to this day, saying things that are sometimes true and sometimes heretical. And when you look at what they say juxtaposed to similar false statements of past cult leaders, you really begin to wonder where the Church is headed. Check it out...



"God is duplicating Himself in the earth."

"I am a little god! I am a little god! God doesn't even draw a distinction between Himself and us. Never, never—you can never do that in a covenant relationship!"

"God's reason for creating Adam was His desire to have reproduced Himself, I mean a reproduction of Himself. And in the Garden of Eden He did that. He was not a little like God. He was not almost little like God. He was not subordinate to God even. And Adam was as much like

God as you could get. Just the same as Jesus when He came into the earth, He said if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. And I want you to know something, Adam in the Garden of Eden was God manifested in the flesh. You don't have a God in you, you are one."

This same televangelist (who said the above statement) also teaches and defends that Jesus lost His deity on the cross, died spiritually was separated from the Father, became demonic, and was latter born again in hell. But the Bible teaches something completely different: "***God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself***" (2 Cor. 5:19). Here are some more quotes of false teachers...

"God came from heaven, became a man, made men into little gods, went back to heaven as a man. He faces the Father as a man. I face devils as the son of God! You say, 'Am I a little God?' You're a son of God aren't you? You're a child of God aren't you? You're a daughter of God aren't you? What else are you? Quit your nonsense, what else are you? If you say 'I am' you're a part of Him right? Is He God? Are you His offspring? Are you His children? You can't be human! When you became born again, the Word was made flesh in you. You became flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone. Don't tell me you have Jesus. You are everything He was and everything He is and ever shall be! The new man says, 'I am as He is' ... Don't say 'I have,' say 'I am, I am, I am, I am, I am!' When you say that 'I am a Christian,' you are saying, 'I am Masheeawck' in the Hebrew. I am a little Messiah walking on earth, in other words. You are a little god on earth running around."

"He laid aside His divine form, Why? So that one day, I would be clothed on with the divine form. Ye are god."

"From the beginning of time the whole purpose of God was to reproduce Himself. Who are you? Come on, who are you? Come on, say it. Sons of God! Come on, say it. Sons of God. Come on, say it! Sons of God, Come on, say it! Sons of God. And what's that work inside us brother? It's that manifestation of the expression of all that God is and all that God has. And when we stand up here brother you're not looking at ____ (The Christian preacher's name removed) you're looking at God. You're not looking at ____ (name removed), you're looking at Jesus! Oh Hallaluya!"

Now let's compare these so called Christian statements with what cultists have said below:

Occult leader Bagwahn Rashneesh in Puna, India took on the title: Bagwahn Shree which means "Sir God." And he said "When you call Jesus really, you have called me. When you have call me really, you have called Jesus." But Sir God is now dead and his body is in the grave.

In the TV movie called "Out on a limb," on the beach at Malibu, Shirley McClain declares, "I am God, I am God, I am God, I am God, I am God!"

Well known witch Margo Addler said, “One reason that I think people are so attracted powerfully to magic and to the pagan religions is not only to worship, lets say mamma in the sky instead of papa in the sky, they want to be God. I mean I think the fundamental thing about the magical religions and about pagan religions is that ultimately they say within yourself you are the God, you are the Goddess. ”

Jim Jones preached, “I’m going to cause you to know that you are what Jesus was. Jesus said that every human being was a God. It is written that you are gods. I’m a God and you’re a God. And I’m a God and going to stay a God until you recognize that you’re a God. And when you recognize you’re a God, then I shall go back into principle and will not appear a personality. You are God! But until I see all of you knowing who you are, I’m going to be very much what I am, God almighty God.”

Branch Davidian cult leader David Koresh explains who he think he is,
“I am the Son of God.”

Perhaps you’ve heard some of these things taught yourself. Please don’t be one who plays fast and lose with the truth. Be careful to be accurate with God’s Word.

The following **criteria** are what many people who call themselves Christians are using to test reality and truth today:

- (1) Experiences, alleged “supernatural manifestations” (accompanied by the much accepted, aggressive contemporary worship music that we all love).*
- (2) Feelings, emotions, fame (Is the speaker a celebrity that your pastor admires. There’s nothing wrong with that, but are they fruit bearing? And you still need to check what they say, just like a Berean)*
- (3) Large numbers of followers*
- (4) Numbers of people who claim to be saved under a certain so called ministry*
- (5) The size of a church campus and all its assets*
- (6) Signs and wonders, purported miracles (and I do believe that God still works miracles today)*
- (7) Subjective snippets of testimonies that don’t square with the Scriptures*
- (8) Hearsay and rumors*
- (9) How financially successful—how wealthy the teacher or preacher appears to be (False teachers—I won’t judge their hearts or their salvation, but what they say. Do they do wrong outside the meeting? I would even say this: if they have a diamond pinky ring, Armani shoes and an exotic pompadour sweep over hair thing going on ...that stuff alone (even though not wrong in and of itself) might just be the first warning sign of them being a false prophet. Come on, cut me some slack here, I’m having fun.*
- (10) If a person speaks with a type of authority, eloquence or confidence (all of which I like)*
- (11) The so called “atmosphere” of a meeting*

But none of the above criteria being used by many churchgoers today is cited in the Bible as ways in which we are to test, discern or properly judge a meeting or a message that we hear.

Listen, false prophets are on the broad path, right near the wide gate saying “Enter in and it will be safe. This is the way of peace (even if they know the people they are speaking to are sinning). You will be saved.” Did you know that there were some well meaning men outside the world trade center on 9/11 directing those people who were exiting the building back inside, saying it’s OK to now reenter the building? Things are under control and everything will be just fine. False teachers always seem to be very sincere, but they are sincerely wrong to the hurt and destruction of others.

Here are Qualities of a True Spiritual Leader (go check these out in Titus):

- 1. In the Spiritual Leader’s home-life, they have earned the right to be respected. I would say go talk to many of their adult relatives.*
- 2. In the personal of life the spiritual leader or pastor, he must continue to model the humble holy life that got him selected.*
- 3. In the public life of the spiritual leader, they must have a good report from those who are outside the Church; yes, among saints and sinners (please stick with the facts rather than hearsay, because some might hate him for speaking the truth). They must model the life that is above reproach.*

False Teachers:

- 1. They sound right, but they are wrong inside and they say the wrong things in a beautiful and often moving way. When some people actually think about what they just heard, what they say is upsetting; it doesn’t square with the Scriptures... upsetting whole families! I’ve never seen one who is humble or accountable. They are rebellious and not open to correction, even when the facts are presented to them with gentleness and respect.*
- 2. They sound like they have right motives, but they hide their wrong and selfish motives for financial gain ...not at all concerned about the elderly, weak-minded or for widows who will give up all due to their manipulation and pressure.*
- 3. They try to appear as though they abound in good works, but in reality, they pull off many wrong deeds.*
- 4. They publicly flaunt size (numbers) and money (Titus 1:11)—they are always aggressively seeking first how they might broaden their personal financial base.*

I would say that any one of the Bible’s seven marks of false teachers should be sufficient identification for you and me:

- 1.) With feigned (fake) words, due to their inner covetousness, they make merchandise of you ...and then merchandisers of you. Gospel greed is the number one mark of a false prophet. Today it is prevalent in the pulpit and in the pew.*
- 2.) Their prophecies do not come to pass, but people have a short memory because they do mix in some truth with their error. My pastor Chuck Smith used to say: Most of what a false teacher teaches is true, but it’s the ten percent arsenic that will get you (Deut. 18:20-22);*
- 3.) They contradict God’s Word (Isaiah 8:20);*

- 4.) *They bear bad fruit (Matthew Matt. 7:17-20);*
- 5.) *All men speak well of them (Lk. 6:26);*
- 6.) *They deny that Jesus, the one and only sinless Christ, has come once and for all in the flesh (1 Jn. 4:3).*
- 7.) *Through signs and wonders they lead people astray after false gods (Deut. 13:1-4).*

*I love what the Bible says, "**Without payment you have received; without payment you are to give**" (Matt. 10:8, *isy*). And of course, biblical signs are still performed by Jesus in our day—they follow the ministry of the Word to confirm it (see the last verse in Mark).*

Remaining loyal to Jesus Christ, the living Word, involves staying absolutely loyal to what the Bible—the written word of God—teaches. Man is not divine; he has absolutely no deity! These mega-ministry ministers sound just like dangerous cultists. It's amazing to me that so many Christians even defend this doctrinal weirdness they put out! My kids had a movie they just loved about the Notre Dame football called "Rudy." Did you ever see it? I remember the older man in that film had better theology than many televangelists. He told Rudy "The one thing I've learned in life is this: That there is a God, and I'm not him."

The Mormons also like to deify man, saying they are gods, quoting: **"I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men"** (Ps. 82:6). In the Bible, when the Lord says, "you are gods" he was speaking to the judges of that day. Why? Because they were making life and death decisions—yes legal judgements and had some control over peoples lives. A judge could sentence you or acquit you. The judges were called gods because they were to represent God to the people. But check out **"I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me"** (Isa. 45:5), or **"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else"** (Isa. 46:9 or Isa. 45:22). What about our Lord response? *"Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?"* (Jn. 10:34).

We've seen this same quote in Psalm 82, but where in the Law did Jesus say that? Well, He said this in Exodus 21:22 *"If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine."* And in Exodus 22:8 *"If the thief be not found, then the master of the house shall be brought unto the judges (that word is Eloheem h430), to see whether he have put his hand unto his neighbour's goods. For all manner of trespass, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whom the judges shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour."* (again Judges here is Eloheem which is: gods [h430 in the Strong's] meaning that they were to act in God's stead—as His representatives). It's interesting that the law came from what Jesus said—Look again, He claimed to author it!

Let's set the record straight! God says in the Bible, **"Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and there is no savior besides Me"** (Isa. 43:10-11 NAS).

Hey, we all have blind spots and disagreeing on secondary doctrines is of course acceptable (we can disagree agreeably), but if we disagree on the *essentials* of our faith we are no longer called Christians.¹ Christian teachers, who are deceived in some areas, don't know they are deceived. The Bible talks about certain false teachers as being apostate, reprobate and against Christ. But I firmly believe that this teacher I've been telling you about, really loves Jesus, is born again and is very sincere in his desire to help the hurting. But with some of what he teaches, he is sincerely wrong—totally believing what he teaches is

true when it isn't. In fact I just heard him say on national radio, "Christians no longer possess a sin nature" (one of his least dangerous doctrines, yet still... Personally, I've found that when I sow to the flesh—to my sin nature instead of to the Spirit—my old nature ends up getting the upper hand).

Now let me define *Pure Subjectivism* for you: Truth is whatever I feel it is, believe it is, say it is, or want it to be, regardless of what the Bible says. The only antidote for this bizarreness is real objectivity. I want you to know that *Relational Theology* today is only one step away from total relativism. This means truth is determined solely by our prayer relationship, which is more important than the written word. This is so false, but as a pastor, almost every month I run into someone in Dallas who wants to break God's law because they heard something in prayer or a personal prophecy. (i.e., "Yes, be blessed my son. You may have sex with her now in the joy of my spirit. For I know that you love her and I have destined to be married after graduation next year.")

"Hypocrisy is a common sin that grieves the Lord above; He longs for those who'll worship Him in faith, truth and genuine love." —Bosch

As a kid did you ever watch *The Untouchables*? I used to be a faithful watcher of this TV show. That was an excellent good-guys verses the-bad-guys series. Elliot was so dignified and cool, and he always got his man. Personally, I've never run into any Christian who felt like criticizing Mr. Ness—he was above reproach and untouchable. I have seen several that unfairly criticized excellent preachers though. We are never to take part in that, even though we should judge their words.

It's so important that a minister's, spirit, message and character line up with the Word of God. But what do we do with preachers who feel that their message and manner is untouchable? You know, with the attitude, "Who are you to judge the vary words from heaven that G~GG~GG~GOD has spoken through me."

You know the Bereans were a cut above the other saints of their day in the area of listening. They are highly commended by God's Word because they tested Paul's teachings (Acts 17:11) and the Thessalonians were commanded to test all things: "***But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil***" (1 Thess. 5:21-22). *Judgment* is not excluded, but *unrighteous* judgment is. Jesus declared: "***Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment***" (Jn. 7:24).

Jesus evaluated things and took the initiative by expelling the moneychangers from the temple, denouncing the Pharisees and scribes, and rebuking the teachers of the Law. There was a time when Jesus matter-of-factly reprimanded Peter in front of the other disciples, "***Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's'***" (Matt. 16:22-23). Paul openly passed judgment on the duplicitous behavior of Peter "***But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy***" (Gal. 2:11, 14). People are so quick to judge people or preachers when they've only heard part of the story. We must stick with the facts! I rarely like to name names, but I will in certain situations to protect God's sheep. Paul even followed Jesus' example, specifically naming false teachers in the church "***Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed,***

accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene (or cancer). Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth (they used be with the truth as Christians?) saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:15-18, emphasis mine).

During His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ exhorted His followers not to judge self-righteously or hypocritically. **“Do not judge so that you will not be judged”** (Matt. 7:1). Is this necessarily what Christians do when they question the teachings of God's "anointed" preachers and evangelists? Many teachers who claim such anointing would say so, and many more of their followers commonly reply to all manner of criticism: **“Touch not God's anointed.”** When witnessing to sinners on the street about Jesus Christ (and I'm not talking about condemning or making an attempt at sinner-reformation), it's very common for the sinners to cast a **“Judge not, lest you be judged”** defense up in your face as a smoke screen. And many Christians don't know that a more literal rendering of Matthew 7:1 is: “Cast not the final judgement.” In other words, don't condemn people to hell, because you aren't the last Judge they'll face.

Josh McDowell says that that **“Judge not, that you be not judged”** (Matt. 7:1) verse is literally the most quoted Bible verse of this decade and it's so often taken out of context. The world says, *“You Christians are supposed to show ‘tolerance’ to all faiths.”* They have even modified the definition of tolerance to mean: *All beliefs of all faiths, all values, and all claims of truth are totally equal and these are a personal matter so don't try to win anyone over to your belief or God.* But the Bible doesn't call us to tolerance as they define it; it calls us to love God through Christ and love people by telling them the Gospel through both word and deed!

With my own ears, I've heard more than one televangelist explain how the judging of any part of their sermon carries literally grave consequences. One of the most prominent of them, under the guise of *“anointed, new revelation,”* teaches (and adamantly defends this teaching) that Christ's work of redemption wasn't finished on the cross, but only begun there, even though Jesus claimed it was a done deal on the cross. At Calvary Jesus said, **“It is finished!” and bowing His head, He gave up His spirit”** (Jn. 19:30). Like I said, this same televangelist (chiming in with all his preacher-friends, whom you'd probably recognize on the tube) also teaches that evil actually entered into Christ's spirit on the cross and He became fully demonic, losing His deity. He still teaches that Jesus Christ died spiritually, was our burnt offering suffering in the flames of hell and then how Jesus had to be spiritually born again in hell to finish the job of redeeming you. Without one verse to verify this jive, I heard him vehemently react on national television saying, *“There are people attempting to sit in judgment right today over the ministry that I'm responsible for... Several people that I know had criticized and called us cultic. And some of 'em are dead right today in an early grave because of it, and there's more than one of them got cancer.”*

Hey, I personally know this preacher's Christian critics and they were fair towards him wanting to restore him. They were respectful and gentle. They were trying to help him, not attack him personally.

In addition to this teacher's doctrine, such sentiments may be found among various groups involved with *shepherding* and other forms of authoritarian rule. The leaders of these groups are commonly regarded as having a unique gift and calling that entitles them to unconditional authority. To dispute any of their words or deeds is not distinguished from questioning God Himself.

Advocates of such authority assume that Scripture supports their view. Their key biblical proof text is Psalm 105:15: **“Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm”** (KJV). But a close

examination of this passage reveals that it has nothing to do with challenging the teachings of church leaders.

It first needs to be noted that the Old Testament phrase "the Lord's anointed" is typically used to refer to the *kings of Israel* (1 Sam. 12:3, 5; 24:6, 10; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sam. 1:14, 16; 19:21; Ps. 20:6; Lam. 4:20), at times specifically to the royal line descended from David (Pss. 2:2; 18:50; 89:38, 51), and not to prophets and teachers. While the text does also mention prophets, in the context of Psalm 105 the reference is undoubtedly to the *patriarchs* in general (vv. 8-15; cf. 1 Chron. 16:15-22), and to Abraham (whom God called a prophet) in particular (Gen. 20:7). It is therefore debatable whether this passage can be applied to select leaders within the body of Christ today.

Even if the text *can* be applied to certain church leaders today, in the context of this passage the words "touch" and "do harm" have to do with inflicting *physical* harm upon someone. Psalm 105:15 is therefore wholly irrelevant to the issue of *questioning* the teachings of any of God's "anointed."

Moreover, even if we accepted this misinterpretation of Psalm 105:15, how are we to know who not to "touch"; that is, who God's anointed and prophets are? *Because they and their followers say they are?* On such a basis we would have to accept the claims of Jim Jones, Sun Myung Moon, Elizabeth Clare Prophet, and virtually all cult leaders to be prophets. *Because they reputedly perform miracles?* The Antichrist and False Prophet themselves will possess that credential (Rev. 13:13-15; 2 Thess. 2:9)!

No, God's representatives are known above all by their *purity of character and clean doctrine* (Tit. 1:7-9; 2:7-8; 2 Cor. 4:2; cf. 1 Tim. 6:3-4). If a would-be spokesperson for God cannot pass the biblical tests of character and doctrine, we have no *basis* for accepting his or her claim, and no *reason* to fear that in criticizing his or her teaching we might also be rejecting God.

Finally, if any individual Christian is to be considered anointed, then every Christian must be as well. For this is the only sense in which the term is used (apart from Christ) in the New Testament: ***"You* [referring to *all* believers] *have an anointing from the Holy One"*** (1 Jn. 2:20, NIV). Thus, no believer can justifiably claim any special status as God's "untouchable anointed" over other believers.

Nobody's teachings or practices are beyond biblical judgment — especially influential leaders. Biblically, authority and accountability go hand in hand (e.g., Lk. 12:48). The greater the responsibility one holds, the greater the accountability one has before God and His people.

Teachers should be extremely careful not to mislead any believer, for their calling carries with it a strict judgment (James 3:1). **They should therefore be grateful when sincere Christians take the time to correct whatever erroneous doctrine they may be preaching to the masses.** And should the criticisms be unfounded they should respond in the manner prescribed by Scripture: to correct misguided doctrinal opposition with gentle instruction rather than throwing a "prophetic" temper tantrum (2 Tim. 2:25).

Christians Criticizing Christians Biblically?

Love should be the motive behind all biblical correction! 1 Corinthians 13:6-7 says, ***"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects."*** There is a right way and timing involved in protecting the flock. If we aren't careful we can hurt others with the Bible and even drive them away from Jesus, ***"for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"*** (2 Cor. 3:6). Jesus Christ wasn't mean to people with the logos—He was kind but gave them no more than was necessary, because He was ***"full of grace and truth"*** (Jn. 1:14).

Do you remember hearing Mike Warnke, whose lucrative career careened through four marriages and more than one affair. He said that God would judge *Cornerstone* magazine for printing a report disproving his ex-satanic high priest "testimony" and exposing his moral lapses. I've heard some other high-profile televangelists say on national television that God would "attack certain ministries and their children" simply because they respectfully refuted their false doctrine. Lauren Stratford's supporters charged Bob and Gretchen Passantino as agents of Satan because they published evidence that Stratford's best-selling testimony of satanic ritual abuse was false.

When it comes to Christians evaluating the words of Christians, the battle lines have unfortunately been drawn. But are the lines biblical? Is it wrong to publicly evaluate the teachings of a Christian pastor, expose the immorality of a Christian leader, or tell the truth about a popular Christian media figure?

Listen, if it was discovered that a batch of Bayer Aspirin contained 15% cyanide and it had actually hit the shelves of stores ubiquitously, the first thing that would happen is that this news story would be immediately covered on all the channels across the land to warn people. **They would name the producer publicly**, yank all remaining Bayer product off the store shelves and give you the date range of the contaminated bottles. Well, how is it wrong to warn people about an influential minister's message that contains 15% doctrinal cyanide (opposing essential Christian doctrine) when daily, people are making important life decisions? We all live according to what we really believe.

Charismatics and Evangelicals avidly warn people about the false teachings and practices of the cults, which claim compatibility with Christianity and yet deny cardinal Christian doctrine. Our standard is truth and our judge is Scripture. Yet when sound apologists turn to false teachings *within* the Christian church, some get squeamish and apply a different standard. Frequently heard objections include, "*Jesus said it's wrong to judge,*" and, "*Criticism is unloving and divisive. Be tolerant dude!*"

Christians who voice these protests fail their own test — they criticize and judge other Christians for criticizing and judging other Christians. Furthermore, these critics fail to understand that without such scrutiny, Christians are misled into heresy and duped by those whose public ministries promote false teachings and/or hide private immoral behavior. Careful, biblical criticism expresses true Christian love and affords essential safeguards to faith.

Paul said in Philippians 1:9, "*And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ*" (emphasis mine).

Good discernment and moral accountability should be practiced among believers! The Old Testament establishes this pattern. Instructions concerning false prophets in Deuteronomy 13:1-5 assume the prophet arises "*from the congregation*" of Israel. People are admonished to banish idolatry from their families: "*If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend...*" (v. 6). Deuteronomy 13 instructs the Israelites how to practice good discernment *within* their communities: "*You must inquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly.*" If the community is idolatrous, it must be dealt with publicly (v. 14). Psalm 50:18 states that one who sees a crime and doesn't report it has moral culpability.

Judgment is not excluded in the New Testament, but *unrighteous* judgment is! Jesus declared: "*Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment*" (Jn. 7:24).

When immorality occurs in the church (Titus 1:15-16), the Bible says to deal with it truthfully and

constructively. The procedure for public leaders caught in false teaching or immorality is for them to be rebuked publicly *"so that the others may take warning"* (1 Tim. 5:20). A congregation member who sins privately against another Christian is not to be exposed publicly unless he (or she) persists in sin, in which case he is to be rebuked before the church and we are to *"treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector"* (Matt. 18:15-17). Paul followed this procedure concerning the Christian who persisted in sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5:3-12), and affirmed that *judgment belongs to the church*.

Christian leaders are accountable to God's people, whom the leaders serve, and should be *"above reproach," "respectable,"* and *"able to teach"* (1 Tim. 3:2). A Christian leader who is a false teacher or immoral should be rebuked to encourage reform (Titus 1:13), and should never try to separate his ministry from his life, expecting God to bless his preaching while privately he sins habitually; he is *"disqualified for every good work"* (vv. 15-16).

It really shocked me to find out that most of what false teachers teach is true? Who would swallow it if it weren't? Heresy is giving people non-nutritional teaching that hurts them, when deep inside they are hungry for nutritional teaching that helps them. And when people are making important life-decisions, and are hungry for the truth, the false teacher is the one who gives them doctrine that's not only contrary to what the Bible says, but it's opposite to what they need. Man, we need to know the Word well!

Telling the truth about false teaching or immorality in the church basically corresponds with the ethics and truth, which are to characterize the church. The church is the *"salt of the earth"* and *"the light of the world"* (Matt. 5:13-14) only if characterized by truthfulness (v. 11) and righteousness (v. 16). The Christian leader has an obligation to *"hold firmly the trustworthy Message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it"* (Titus 1:9). No Christian is happy when false teaching or immorality arises, but we cannot neglect responsibility for doctrinal and moral accountability.

The problem with many Christians is that they are nicer than Jesus Christ! They are afraid of lack or what they could lose. There's a lot at stake! But in God's house Christ got proactive pretty quick one day—it was because He hates sin and loves people. *"When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!'"* (Jn. 2:15-16).

If we don't hate sin, falsehood, the works of the flesh and devils to the same degree that Jesus hates them—if we don't love righteousness, truth, God and people to the same degree Jesus loves them—guess what? WE HAVE ROOM FOR GROWTH!

Christians are often uncomfortable with criticism within the church because they assume that public criticism, since it is painful, is also destructive. On the contrary, the "pain" of biblically conducted confrontation produces individual growth (1 Tim. 4:16), encourages others to Christian maturity (1 Tim. 5:19-20), promotes church strength (Eph. 4:15), and preserves the church's reputation and witness in the world. Christian, you are to be *"having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation"* (1 Pet. 2:12).

¹ When Christians talk about *The Essentials*, we are referring to the basic elements that make up and characterize our historic faith, and which separate it from other false belief systems in the earth.

We all need to be radically committed to St. Augustine's maxim: "*In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, and in all things charity.*" We don't ever want to break fellowship with other Christians because we can't come into a full agreement about the periphery doctrines of our faith that aren't pertinent to salvation—namely non-essentials. Our goal is to make people so familiar with the Word of God and the essentials of the Christian faith that when a counterfeit looms on the horizon, they will recognize it instantaneously.

There must be unity around the essentials, since **essential Christian doctrine forms the line of demarcation between the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the cults.** Today, as perhaps never before, this line is not just slightly blurred by false teachers and their teachings, but it is being totally distorted. The tide in evangelicalism is turning from unity *around* the essentials to unity *despite* the essentials, but we aver that truth is more important than unity. Movements within our culture today—cults as well as within the church—are compromising, confusing, and contradicting essential Christian doctrine.

It is precisely because these essentials have been redefined that millions have a completely distorted view of what it means to be a Christian today. Several putative "Christian leaders," (para-church TV preachers) exacerbate the confusion and I believe unintentionally officiate what's real by using Christian terminology when it comes to the essentials, *but the meaning they pour into the words they use is decidedly unbiblical.* Anyway, here's the essentials:

First, we believe in the authority of the Scripture, which is another way of saying that the Bible is God's inspired, infallible and inerrant Word. It's the ultimate source for knowledge about God, as well as the definitive guide for our everyday lives.

Second, we affirm the existence of a triune God, or one God in three distinct persons (or personalities, not three Gods)—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This God is self-existent, eternal, unchanging, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, righteous, and loving. God created the universe from nothing and He rules over His creation Sovereignly including both human and angelic beings.

Third, we also hold that man is a physical and spiritual being who is created in God's image. But because of his sin or transgression, man has lost his fellowship with God. The extent of sin is so great that its effects continue to this very day in the form of cruelty, suffering, and death.

Next, by God's grace, Jesus Christ—who is fully God and fully man—was sent to save us from our bondage to sin. We believe that Christ was born of a virgin, died vicariously for our sins, physically rose from the dead, and will one day return to judge the world and deliver His people. Personal faith in Jesus Christ is the only means by which mankind can escape eternal damnation and judgment.

Finally, we recognize the church as God's ordained institution—a living organism that's headed by Jesus Christ. The true Church is composed of all believers, and is organized for worship, for fellowship, for the administration of the sacraments, for spiritual growth and support, and for the evangelization of the world.

A lot more can be said about these, but here is some further reading: Paul Little's book *Know What You Believe*, also Bruce Milne's *Know The Truth* (IVP).