

“LORD” IS MORE THAN A TITLE

Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:15-23, RSV

He came to the college wearing white pants, white shirt, white tie and white shoes. It was reported (though I never verified it) that everything underneath was also white. He said that he wanted to be a theology major, that God had called him to the ministry.

One of the dilemmas college religion teachers have is daring to decide that someone is or is not fitted for the ministry. How can human beings evaluate someone's fitness for the ministry?

When I was in college, the stories used to circulate about the famous preachers who got D's in every course, who never passed Greek and who still made a significant contribution to the work. They hung on in spite of all their setbacks because they believed that God had called them to the ministry.

On the other hand, we would read quotations such as: “There are many behind pulpits who should be behind plows, and many behind Plows who should be behind pulpits.”

Even though it seemed audacious, it also seemed to be appropriate to evaluate people who were talking about being Christian leaders. To do that the staff of the college where I used to teach instituted a program under the direction of a Loma Linda University professor. He devised an instrument for evaluating a person's potential success for the ministry. With this instrument and some follow-up counseling, a lot of good things should happen. No. one ever tells the ministerial candidate “You should not enter the ministry.” the hope is that if he (or she) shouldn't, he will recognize it.

The first time we followed this procedure some interesting things happened. One young man showed clearly on the test that he wasn't really going to be happy as a pastor. He did not show a high sociability. He wasn't interested in people. The test showed that he really wanted to be an artist. In the counseling which followed the test, the adviser tried to explore his feelings and get him to open up. A familiar story emerged: he was a new convert and he had been led to believe that the best way to serve God was as a pastor. He had a theological problem but after the counseling and careful consideration, he dropped out of the theology program and became an art major. I like to think that he is much happier and really fulfilling God's will more perfectly than if he had stayed in the ministry.

Another person on the first go-around showed a very high need for prestige and social acceptance. By itself this might not be a bad tendency but when you are considering the ministry, you have to examine why you want to be a minister if your need for prestige is that high. This test result was discussed with him and he did continue in the ministry. He was confronted with the possibility that his motives for going into the ministry might not have been as pure as he had thought and the voice of God that he thought he heard might have been partly his own need for recognition.

There was a kind of cultural context in Jesus' day which made him alert to this type of situation. In our Scripture Reading when he says, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves,” he is talking about something that was familiar to his hearers. In the Old Testament the prophets eventually adopted a uniform, which came from the shepherds. Because of their outdoor work the shepherds had adopted the custom of wearing sheepskin, with the fleece on the inside for warmth. In time the prophets adopted this same type of clothing as a uniform and the

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Israelites had learned to use this kind of clothing to distinguish a prophet from an ordinary man. Occasionally people wore the sheepskin who had no right to wear it.

In the literature of the early church you will find references to wandering prophets who went from church to church. As they visited the various churches, they would edify and instruct and be a real blessing. An early church document (the “Didache”) points out that there were some men who abused the role, who claimed to be prophets but who weren’t. They were trying to get congregations to accept them as prophets for personal gain and prestige. Some regulations were published so that the true prophet could be distinguished from the false prophet:

1. He shall remain one day, and if necessary, another day also, but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet.
2. He must never ask for anything but bread. If he asks for money he is a false prophet.
3. Every prophet who teaches the truth, if he does not do what he teaches, is a false prophet.

That’s why Jesus talks about the figs and the grapes in the Scripture Reading: “You will know them by their fruits.” There were bushes that resembled the fruit trees but when you got close to them you realized that there were thorns or thistles on them and you could tell them from the real trees. Jesus warned us to be careful of the superficial resemblance between the false and the true. What appears to emerge from the Didache and other early writings concerning the false prophets is this: A false prophet is almost always absorbed in self-interest. It is not what he can give that concerns him; it is what he can get. It is not feeding the congregation that concerns him but feeding *off* them.

This indicates the truth of the statement I have read recently about the ministry: Only a man (or woman) who could walk away from the ministry is safe in the ministry. If you have compelling fundamental and psychological needs to be in the ministry, you may be in the ministry for all of the wrong reasons. There is nothing wrong with my personal needs being met by my profession but that cannot be the fundamental motivation. If it is, we may have some false prophets. There is a surprise in this passage. When you read verse 21, he says, “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father.” He goes on to say, “many will say to me, ‘Lord, lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’” Then he says “I declare to them, ‘I never knew you.’”

That is a surprise. Some people passionately profess Christ as Lord yet Jesus says to them in the judgment: ‘You did many things in my name but I never knew you.’ Apparently they had been doing things in God’s name for themselves and not for God. God had become their servant rather than their becoming his servant.

The suggestion is obviously that there is unconscious self-deception going on. They thought they were honest, sincere and saved but they were not. They thought they were committed to God’s cause, they wanted to see God’s will accomplished but, in fact, they were serving their self-interest.

I’m not sure that any of us can really appreciate the implications of what Jesus is saying here. Even in the church we tend to reward people very often for reasons that God would not honor—position,

prestige, numbers, degrees.

I'll never forget a class I took at the Seminary under Dr. Heppenstall. He talked about the problem of pride and told about a student of his who had gone out to serve as a minister in a local church and earned a doctor's degree. When he completed the degree requirements, his members asked him, "What should we call you?" He said, "Call me doctor, please." The proud are the last to find out about their pride. They very easily see pride in other people and don't understand that they have already succumbed to it.

When I was grading freshmen composition papers as a senior English major in college, I found it easy to catch someone else's grammatical error. I discovered, though, that it was easy to do exactly the same thing when I was preparing my own papers. My major professor was writing a dissertation at the time and she sometimes gave a chapter to me to read. I would read her material and see all these grammatical mistakes, and I would point them out to her and say, "How can you make a mistake like this? This is an elementary mistake." She made it clear to me (and experience has demonstrated this to me) that you can't edit your own writing. Almost no one is good enough to edit his own writing. He cannot see the mistakes in what he has done as quickly as he sees the mistakes in what others have done.

That experience in [college] English is true throughout life. We have phenomenal capacities to lie to ourselves about ourselves. Some psychoanalysts have urged people to keep a journal while they are going through therapy to help them get into honest self-discovery. They want them to record what they feel and who and what they are.

It is interesting that Dr. Karen Horney, a very famous psychoanalyst, did some analysis on Rousseau on the basis of his journals, his confessions, and she made this comment after reading this material:

Here is a man who apparently wants to give an honest picture of himself and does so to a moderate extent, but throughout the book he retains blind spots concerning his vanity and his inability to love. These are so blatant that they impress us today as grotesque. He is frank about what he expects and accepts from others but he interprets the resulting dependency as love. He recognizes his vulnerability but he relates it to his feeling heart. He recognizes his animosities but they always turn out to be warranted, and he sees his failures but always others are responsible for them.

Have you ever met a person who is always in trouble but it's everybody else's fault. He never fails; he never makes a mistake; someone else did it. Shakespeare said, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in ourselves, but in our stars."

We all lie to some extent; I hate to tell you that. What makes lying so dangerous, especially to other people, is that you eventually start lying to yourself. (This is a danger especially for young people who often feel they must lie to their parents, etc., because they feel they can't live with a certain amount of freedom unless they do lie.) You start out trying to keep the truth from other people and you wind up keeping the truth from yourself. One writer has said that everyone pretends to be what he is not. We form a kind of secret picture within ourselves. Even though life does not correspond to this secret imagination, we still cling to it. We feel we are lions, eagles, supermen, and we never realize what we

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are actually like. He suggests that we all harbor the feeling, for example, that we are able to speak the truth without bias to other people. We can tell anyone without bias what the truth is and we can tell ourselves what the truth is. It can be shown, however, that we are actually more apt to tell something in such a way that we are put in the most favorable light.

In Karen Horney's book, *Self-Analysis*, she tries to point the way in helping us understand what some of the cues might be that we are not being honest with ourselves. One of the cues is anger and how we deal with it. She maintains that it is easier to be angry at somebody else or at some situation than to look within for the vulnerable spot that has been hit. It doesn't matter how cruel or how inconsiderate the person has been, she will not let us off the hook in this book. I want to share her illustration that will "open the door" into understanding oneself:

Let us assume that a wife is deeply disturbed at learning that her husband has had a transient affair with another woman. Even months later she cannot get over it, although she knows it is a matter of the past and although the husband does everything to re-establish a good relationship. She makes herself and him miserable, and now and then goes on a spree of bitter reproaches against him. There are a number of reasons that might explain why she feels and acts in this way, quite apart from a genuine hurt about the breach of confidence. It may have hurt her pride that the husband could slip out from her control and domination. The incident may have touched off a dread of desertion. She may be discontented with the marriage for reasons of which she is not aware, and she may use this conspicuous occurrence as an excuse for expressing all her repressed grievances, thus engaging merely in an unconscious campaign of revenge. She may have felt attracted toward another man and resent the fact that her husband indulged in a freedom that she had not allowed herself. If she examined such possibilities she might not only improve the situation considerably but also gain a much clearer knowledge of herself. Neither result is possible, however, as long as she merely insists upon her right to be angry. The situation would be essentially the same if she had repressed her anger, though in that case it would be much more difficult to detect her resistance toward self-examination. (pp. 283-284.)

It is very hard to be honest with ourselves, but in Christian theology there is one fundamental need that we all have if we are going to be honest with ourselves, and Jesus gets to it in the Scripture Reading. That need is to have a center in our lives that we can absolutely trust without any fear or reservation. I can't be honest with myself if I think I'm going to lose acceptance and love. When Christ is the Lord of our lives, the One who is at the center, and we are convinced that he is not a despot, but a Father and a brother, it is much easier to be honest with ourselves and avoid falling into self-deception. What Jesus is implying in this passage is that these false prophets could be self-deceived because he was never the Lord of their lives. They used his name. They did his deeds but because they lacked the needed relationship with him they could never be honest with themselves and consequently lived a life of self-deception.

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount in verses 24 and following:

Every one then -who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one

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who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand... (Matt. 7:24-27).

To build one's life upon lies like the false prophets is to build one's life upon the sand. It cannot withstand the storms; especially, it cannot withstand the storms of truth.

One of the most terrible things I've ever witnessed is the crumbling of a human being, when after many years of running away from the truth about themselves, it hits them and they have to face it and it's so unpleasant they can't bear it.

In Adventist beliefs, one of the major signs that we belong to Christ is the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not supposed to be an external sign. The point of the Sabbath is not that we keep a day and other people keep a different day. The point of the Sabbath is that there is a quality of life, a holiness of time, that we enter into and participate in. In that time there is a sense of acceptance through worship and a sense of love through worship that allows us to face the truth honestly about ourselves and other people and the world around us. Ellen White calls it a “settling into the truth,” a comfortableness with the truth, not being threatened by it. In the judgement there are only two classes of people: those who are evil but who think they are good, and those who are in Christ but understand that they are evil, that apart from him they have nothing. Jesus said,

I know my sheep, and they hear my voice and follow me. When they say, “Lord, Lord,” it is to do my will and to glorify my name. Those sheep are not false and they will be among the few who enter into my kingdom.