

# We Need to Recognize God's Servants

## Confession # 16

**Preached by:** Matthew S. Black

**Text:** 2 Corinthians 10:7-11

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**Series:** Confessions of an Imperfect Church (2 Corinthians)

**Introduction:** Open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 10. We are continuing our series through the book of 2 Corinthians entitled, "Confessions of an Imperfect Church". And like the imperfect church at Corinth, we have a long way to go in our growing and changing in Christ.

Today's confession is this: "We Need to Recognize God's Servants".

How do we distinguish the voice of God's true shepherds from the wolves in sheep's clothing? The vast reach of media has given a platform to false teachers like no other time in the church's history.

Paul said to the Ephesian elders in **Acts 20:29** (ESV) — "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock". They always teach "damnable heresies" and lies (**2 Pet. 2:1**).

Paul said to the Thessalonians in **1 Thessalonians 5:20-21** (ESV) — "Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good." We are not to be critical of preaching, but we are to be careful how we listen and "test everything".

Jesus warned us in the Sermon on the Mount — "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (**Matthew 7:15**, ESV).

## John Wesley

The famous Great Awakening preacher, John Wesley, was quite biblically educated before he was converted but needed a spiritual awakening himself. He had been an ordained Anglican missionary to the American Indians of Georgia in the colonies, and his work there had failed miserably. Back in London, he had a conversation with a Moravian missionary, Peter Böhler that would plant the seeds for His eyes to be opened. Then came the ever-memorable 24th of May, 1738. One historian said, "...that day in ecclesiastical annals is like the day on which Saul of Tarsus saw Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Listen to Wesley's own account of his conversion:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely

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<sup>1</sup> James Knowles. *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review, Vol XXIX*. (New York: Kegan Paul, Trench, Tubner, and Co. Ltd., 1891), 485.

warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.... I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart.<sup>2</sup>

As we can see from John Wesley, that there are preachers out there with a biblical knowledge, but no real understanding of the Gospel or of Christ. How can we recognize a true teacher of the Word?

As Paul begins to confront the false teachers in Corinth, he begins with a call for examination! “Look at what is before your eyes” (vs. 7a).

**2 Corinthians 10:7-11** (ESV) — “Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ’s, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ’s, so also are we. 8 For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. 9 I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. 10 For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.” 11 Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present.”

From this passage we are going to see that true teachers are...

- **Credible** (in their walk with God)
- **Constructive** (in people’s lives)
- **Compassionate** (with people)
- **Confident** (in the Gospel)
- **Consistent** (in their Christian life)
- Next week we will look at one last important trait in detail: they are **contrite**, or humble.

## I. **God’s Servant must be Credible** (vs. 7).

**2 Corinthians 10:7** (ESV) — “Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ’s, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ’s, so also are we.”

### **Under Attack!**

The idea is that these false teachers were coming from no where claiming to be sent by Christ with no authority. But Paul was under attack!! What do you do when you are under attack? Have you ever had someone doubt your integrity?

Can you imagine the heartache that Paul must have felt? The accusations had degenerated to the point that the false teachers at Corinth were spreading vicious lies doubting that Paul was even a Christian.

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<sup>2</sup> John Wesley. *The Heart of John Wesley’s Journal* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co, 1903), 43.

**Application:** What do you do when you are attacked? You hang on to who you are in Christ. What did Paul do? Paul submitted himself to the Lord.

Remember that Jesus “when he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Pet. 2:23).

Spurgeon on Attacks

I love what Charles Spurgeon says about personal attacks.

“If any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him, for you are worse than he thinks you to be. If he charges you falsely on some point, yet be satisfied, for if he knew you better he might change the accusation, and you would be no gainer by the correction. If you have your moral portrait painted and it is ugly, be satisfied, for it only needs a few blacker touches, and it would be still nearer the truth.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Paul was Confident in Christ**

Paul knew who he was in Christ. But this attack was especially hard because of his close relationship with the Corinthian church.

- Paul had planted the church at Corinth.
- His conversion was established in the events of history on the Damascus Road. All knew Christ had met him there.
- Paul was blameless; he had the joy of Christ; he was a soldier who at the end of his life could say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”.
- Paul was credible. He could say “I am in Christ”. That’s all you need for the battles ahead of you. All other armaments are vain. Christ is all the messenger of God needs for his credibility.

A. **False teachers** lack credibility.

Who were the **false teachers** in Corinth? They claimed to be Christ’s, but they were imposters. They had the wrong foundation.

1. False teachers boast in the **external**.

The false teachers at Corinth were boasting in their ethnicity. They were Jews. **2 Corinthians 11:22** (ESV) — “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I.” Paul later says, he’s talking like an insane person. Why? Because your ethnicity has nothing to do with your

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*. Vol. 34 [1888].

spirituality. They that worship the Lord worship in spirit and truth. God is omnipresent to all people. Your ethnicity, socio-economic background, your family – all have nothing to do with your walk with Christ. We can all say “By the grace of God I am what I am...” (1 Cor. 15:10).

2. False teachers are focused on **fleshly methods**.

At Corinth, the false teachers were dedicated to Greek sophistry, eloquence, and personality – they scorned Paul as being “unskilled in speaking” (2 Cor. 11:6, ESV). Paul warned Timothy, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (2 Tim. 4:3). False teachers are willing to neglect sound, solid doctrine in order to gain a larger crowd.

3. False teachers allow carnality and immorality to go **unchecked**.

The false teachers at Corinth were practicing and allowing blatant **immorality** in the church. **2 Corinthians 12:21** (ESV) — “I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.” They were antinomian in their focus. They had little regard for purity

4. False teachers teach **another Gospel**.

Worst of all, these false teachers at Corinth taught **another Gospel** and another Jesus. They were legalists that added works to salvation. **2 Corinthians 11:4** (ESV) — “For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.” In fact Paul says, these men “men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:13–14).

- B. **God’s messenger** and true children on the other hand always have a credible walk with Christ, and have deep, lasting fruit.

Paul says in **2 Corinthians 10:7** (ESV) — “Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ’s, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ’s, so also are we.” Paul says, “my credibility is before your eyes—my life and testimony are obvious.”

1. They all knew he was “in Christ”. They had heard his personal testimony, and how Christ appeared to him on the Damascus Road.
2. They knew that he had founded the church at Corinth.
3. They had observe him living among them for an entire year when he planted the

church. He was not an outsider, but lived among them as one of them.

**Application:** How about you? Can you say with confidence and gratitude that you are a true child of God? Do you have a testimony that you could give before the congregation this morning if you were called on? Do you know Christ? Do you know what it means to be born again and justified in Christ? Could you stand before the congregation with a testimony and life that demonstrates that you truly know Christ? Do you have a credible testimony in Christ? If you are going to be used of God, that's where it all begins.

***You've got to share Christ out of the overflow of your life.***

God's ministers should be...

- **Credible** (in their walk with God)
- **Constructive** (in people's lives)

## II. God's Servant must be **Constructive** (vs. 8).

**2 Corinthians 10:8** (ESV) — “For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for **building you up** and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed.”

- A. True messengers of God **build** the church. Jesus said, “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18).

Paul was a very humble servant of God. He was very careful about boasting in his gifting or authority. But even if he decided to cross the limit, he would not be ashamed because he was real. He would never have to eat his words because he said so little about his fruit. His fruit and gifting spoke for itself. Paul had planted churches all around the Roman Empire. He laid down his life to build people up.

The proof of his ministry was in the sheep that he pastored. He loved on them. He cared for them. He cried with them. He built them up. Even when he had to say hard things, it was to build them up.

- Paul goes on to say in **2 Corinthians 12:15** (ESV) — “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.”
- A true pastor wants to lay his life down for the sheep.
- Paul was a tent maker among the Corinthians. He took no salary during the year he was with them (**1 Cor. 9:1-15**).
- Shepherds build the sheep primarily by being faithful to the Word of God.
  - Peter put it this way in **1 Peter 5:2-4** (ESV) — “shepherd [*feed*] the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; **not for shameful gain**, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”
  - Look at God's promise in **Jeremiah 3:15** (ESV) — “And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will **feed** you with

knowledge and understanding.”

- **1 John 3:16** (ESV) — “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

**Application:** Are you constructive? Are you building the people around you up? Are you laying your life down for them? Or are you selfish and inwardly focused?

B. False teachers don't mind if people's lives are **torn** apart.

False teachers are powerless to transform people's lives. They are not interested in seeing people saved. They want a fan club. They want the fame and the fortune. And they are willing to tear people's lives apart to get it.

False teachers, they tear up the church. They destroy it. They bring confusion, and division. Their influence in the church is contrary to the purposes of Christ who said, “I will build My church.” The Lord's messengers **do not** destroy the church. They build it.

Their goal is to draw people after them. They are not concerned how the people live. They just want the seats warmed. They want a following.

- Paul said to the Ephesian elders in **Acts 20:29** (ESV) — “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, **not sparing the flock.**”
- Peter said in **2 Peter 2:3** (KJV) — “And through covetousness shall they with feigned words **make merchandise of you**...” False teachers are glad to market themselves to the people of God. They will even make merchandise of Christians.
- As we read in our Scripture reading in **Isaiah 56:10-11**, (ESV) — speaking of false teachers, “His watchmen are blind; they are all without knowledge; they are all silent [lazy] dogs; they cannot bark, dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber. 11 The dogs have a mighty appetite; they never have enough. But they are shepherds who have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all.”

C. The kind of destroying true servants of God do is to tear down the deceitful **philosophies** that keep people in bondage (**2 Cor. 10:1-6**). We fight with the truth to destroy lies!

**Application:** Paul tells us we all have a responsibility to build up the Body in **Ephesians 4:11–12** (ESV) — “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ**”. We are all called to edify and be constructive! We all have a duty to one another to be there, be dependable for each other.

God's ministers should be...

- **Credible** (in their walk with God)
- **Constructive** (in people's lives)

- **Compassionate** (with people)

### III. God's Servant must be **Compassionate** (vs. 9).

**2 Corinthians 10:9** (ESV) — "I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters."

The false teachers were calling Paul a coward. But Paul's intention with his letters was not to frighten. Paul had great compassion for this beloved church he planted.

The truth sometimes frightens people. It is frightening. But it is deep compassion that compels the heroes among us to tell the truth.

R. Kent Hughes says this:

"As to Paul's letters, some were scorches. Various, Paul had threatened *destruction* to the destroyer of God's people (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17) and then *exclusion* from the Kingdom to those who continued in sin (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). Paul had also three times called for *judgment* among God's people (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:1, 2 and 2 Corinthians 2:4–11). Therefore, we can be quite sure his tearful letter was a formidable, fiery missive (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:4; 7:8)."<sup>4</sup>

A. Like a good **doctor**, God's messenger is compassionate enough to give the correct diagnosis. Paul commands us in **Titus 1:9** (ESV) — "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."

- Your doctor through compassion gives the correct diagnosis and prognosis.

### **Emergency Room**

The church ought to be like an Emergency Room. Things are very different in an Emergency Room, compared to anywhere else on earth. The mood is serious. **I've never heard of a patient swing at a doctor for giving him a correct diagnosis.** Sometimes there are gasps. Sometimes the truth is hard to hear.

Our church ought to be a place where we are fighting for the spiritual lives of each other! In order to save lives, we must give the correct diagnosis. The truth hurts, but we must always tell the truth!

- In an ER, there is no time for quarrel, no room for jealousy, no place for grudges.
- Isn't this how the Lord wants us to live, to be concerned about loving someone else, saving the dying and nursing the injured?
- To be in a room where compassion flows and healing takes place?

### **Mailman**

B. Like a **mailman**, God's messenger must be careful to deliver the mail without tampering with it.

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<sup>4</sup> Hughes, R. K. (2006). *2 Corinthians : Power in weakness*. Preaching the Word (187–188). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

Can you imagine if we got mad at the mailman when he brought us bills? Paul was just bringing God's mail to the Corinthian church, and they were frightened by it. But Paul's motive was to bring them to repentance. And that's exactly what happened in 2 Cor. 7.

Can you imagine if you sock the mailman when he brings you a bill? That's crazy! He's just the mailman!

God's true messengers are just mailmen. They are ambassadors and heralds that are to bring the message of the King faithfully. They are not to edit or add or subtract from the message. They are to preserve the message. The Word of God is perfect. It is sufficient. It is all we need for life and godliness. No one can improve upon it. It is the perfect Word of Truth – “the implanted Word which is able to save your souls”.

**Application:** Let me encourage you as a believer in Christ to tell the truth to people. Be true to the Word of God. Be loving, and compassionate enough to tell the truth to your brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Application:** You might say, well, I'm not an apostle or a pastor or even a teacher. Yes, but the Word of God says that we are to “admonish each other”. Paul tells us in **Hebrews 10:24-25**, (KJV) — “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but **exhorting one another**: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

It is important to be present when Christ's Body is assembled. A lot of the exhorting and encouraging takes place in each gathering. You are not here just for the preaching of the Word, but also for fellowship and for exhortation and encouragement.

If you are a Christian, you ought to be here Sunday evening for testimonies and Bible Study. You ought to be here on Wednesday night for prayer.

### **Spurgeon Prayer Meeting Quote**

C H Spurgeon said this,

“There are numbers who never attend the prayer meeting and so deny the Lord Jesus even the cheap love-token of their prayers.”<sup>5</sup>

It is so important to look for these marks in God's messengers. If they don't have these marks avoid them! God's ministers should be...

- **Credible** (in their walk with God)
- **Constructive** (in people's lives)
- **Compassionate** (with people)
- And fourthly, **Confident** (in the Gospel)

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Spurgeon, "Bringing the King Back", a sermon on 2 Samuel 19:10, preached April 19, 1868 in the Evening Service. Sermon #808 in the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*.



#### IV. God's Servant must be **Confident** (vs. 10).

**2 Corinthians 10:10** (ESV) — “For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.”

A. We ought not be confident in worldly **contextualization**.

There was no doubt that Paul's letters were weighty and strong. But they did not understand as they said, “his bodily presence is weak”, and he doesn't know how to talk!

#### **Paul was purposely not contextualizing here.**

This is important! It was offensive to the Greeks at Corinth, and even to the Jewish false teachers, that Paul was so small in his persona and stature.

It wasn't that Paul couldn't be more of a presence. He had done that on Mars Hill in Athens and before the Roman governors. But it is as if he is purposely holding back his persona and the power of his presence, in order that God might get all the glory.

#### **Description of Paul**

Kent Hughes writes about the physical description of the Apostle Paul:<sup>6</sup>

Among the descriptions of Paul that have come down to us, the only one that has any possibility of being based on early tradition is the famous paragraph from *The Acts of Paul and Thekla*, which the great classical scholar and archaeologist Sir William Ramsey assigned to the first century.

The description in the Syriac version reads that Paul was:

“A man of middling size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were projecting (or far apart); and he had large eyes, and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long.”<sup>7</sup>

This agrees with Paul's detractors' estimation of his bodily presence as “weak” (v. 10). By both estimates Paul in person cut a sorry figure and was far from the Greco-Roman ideal.<sup>8</sup>

The false teachers of Paul's day depended on the external, outward showiness and the power of persona. We would call it the “cult of personality”. The false teachers “felt that true Christian leadership should be impressive, bold, visionary, triumphalistic, and characterized by signs of rhetoric.”<sup>9</sup>

B. True messengers of God depend on the **power** of the Gospel.

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<sup>6</sup> Hughes, R. K., *2 Corinthians*, 187.

<sup>7</sup> Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 283.

<sup>8</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, *The Anchor Bible, II Corinthians*, translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), p. 468.

<sup>9</sup> Carson, *From Triumphalism to Maturity*, 63.

When it comes right down to it – God must save the human soul. It is unredeemable through rhetoric, manipulation, and false fire. We can heighten people’s emotions through music, through emotional stories, and through human gimmicks, but until a soul is brought to nothing through the Gospel, they cannot be helped. They must enter through the narrow gate with nothing but their need for Christ.

- Paul said in **Romans 1:16** (ESV) — “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”
- **Romans 10:17** (ESV) — “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”
- **James 1:21** (ESV) — “...Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls”.

Paul was confident in the power of God’s revelation of Himself in the Bible to transform lives. Paul was confident in the sufficient Word of God!

C. God’s plan to transform you is not in a pill or in a guru or in a program or in some human plan. God’s plan to transform you is in His perfect Word.

- Jesus said in **John 8:32** (ESV) — “... you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
- **Ephesians 4:23** (ESV) — “... be renewed in the spirit of your minds”.

True servants of God are...

- **Credible** (in their walk with God)
- **Constructive** (in people’s lives)
- **Compassionate** (with people)
- **Confident** (in the Gospel)
- **Consistent** (in their Christian life)

## V. God’s Servant be **Consistent** (vs. 11).

**2 Corinthians 10:11** (ESV) — “Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present.”

What Paul promised in his letters, he was ready to carry out in person. “There was no disjunction between Paul’s words and deeds, and there never would be. His character was of one fabric.”<sup>10</sup>

John MacArthur says this: “Paul is no hypocrite. He is no fake. He’s no phony. He’s the same man whether writing from afar, or speaking near. He’s the same man wherever he is. And I warn you about false prophets, they are one man before the crowd, and they are another man in private. Most of the time they are one man before the crowd and another man before the

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<sup>10</sup> Hughes, R. K. (2006). *2 Corinthians*, 188.

individual. They love the crowd, they disdain the individual.”<sup>11</sup>

Consistency is especially important in leaders, but the goal for every child of God is Christlike character.

- Character is WHO we are on the inside, not simply what we say or do, because we can say or do things simply to impress others.
- Character is a CHOICE; it is not a gift or an endowment. It has to be built up over time, by the right choices we made in our daily life.<sup>12</sup>

We often promise that we are going to change, but we find it hard to follow through. How can we be consistent?

1. Be consistent in fellowship and attendance with other believers. If you are going to reach people for Christ you need to form the pillars of your life around fellowship, the apostles’ doctrine preached, and prayers like they did in the early church.
2. Be consistent in your walk with Christ – reading the Word in private devotion and in prayer. If you are married or have children, do this with them! This is the primary way of evangelism with your children.
3. Be consistent in your personal choices at home and at work. Live out and apply God’s Word to your every day life.

**Conclusion:**

### **The Antonio Stradivarius Violins**

Antonio Stradivari was born in 1644 and set up his shop in Cremona, Italy, where he made violins and other stringed instruments until his death in 1737. As a master craftsman, his violins have served as *the* standard for all violin makers since. Nothing compares with his amazing violins—every Stradivarius was made entirely by hand, with specialized woods and varnishes and secrets of craftsmanship that died with Stradivarius.<sup>13</sup> Only 512 of these violins exist today. Literally millions of fakes have been bought and sold since the time of Stradivarius.

We understand the need to have authentication even in earthly things. Think about the famous Stradivarius violins. Today, literally hundreds of thousands of Stradivarius violins are being sold even though only 512 are known to be in existence today! Each one of the originals is worth from one to three million dollars. Knowing this, I decided to do a search on the online auction site Ebay today and not surprisingly I found 282 for sale with the highest price being an amazingly low **\$3,000**. There’s a great need for authentication!

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<sup>11</sup> John MacArthur. *How to Recognize a True Man of God*. Comments on 2 Corinthians 10:11.

<sup>12</sup> Quote from Christian Cheong from June 2010 – message, “True Seekers – Compassion”.

<sup>13</sup> See the article, “The Violin as an Historical Sketch” from W.S.B. Mathews, ed. *Music: A Monthly Magazine, Devoted to the Art, Science, Technic and Literature of Music, Vol. VIII* (Chicago: The Music Magazine Publishing Co., 1895), 591-593.

The authentication of a Stradivarius violin can be determined only by a careful examination of each violin looking at the design, the model, Stradivarius's personal craftsmanship, and the specialized woods and varnishes used. It is not hard to separate out the mass-produced violins from the actual hand-made instruments, but most people are not willing to investigate. There are therefore thousands of people are defrauded each year!

Let not one of us be defrauded by the claim of so many who call themselves true messengers of God. We must be careful to look for the identifying marks.

It is vital that we recognize the difference between true and false teachers. True teachers are...

- **Credible** (in their walk with God)
- **Constructive** (in people's lives)
- **Compassionate** (with people)
- **Confident** (in the Gospel)
- **Consistent** (in their Christian life)

Next week we will look at one last important trait in detail: they are **contrite**, or humble.