

## **The Unfaithful Minister Described #1**

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Micah 3:5-7; 1 John 4:1

Greg L. Price

How different is the spirit of this age from the Spirit of Scripture when it comes to distinguishing between faithful ministers and unfaithful ministers. The spirit of this age recoils and shrinks from identifying almost any minister as unfaithful. Although we must be ever so cautious not to mark a minister as unfaithful without sufficient testimony, nevertheless, we must not go to the opposite extreme in refusing to apply the description of “unfaithful” to a minister when it is necessary to do so.

Contrary to the spirit of this age, the Spirit of Christ commends the elders of a church that judicially try and identify certain men as false or unfaithful ministers based upon their works and doctrine (Revelation 2:2,6,15). And though the Spirit of Christ gives not the keys of the kingdom to individual believers so as to render ecclesiastical judgement concerning an unfaithful minister, nevertheless, the Spirit of Christ does give to every believer the individual right to judge for his own or his family’s spiritual well-being whether a minister is faithful or unfaithful to the doctrine of Christ (1 John 4:1).

We first considered the ministry of the faithful shepherd (as exemplified in the prophet Micah). This Lord’s Day we move on to consider the ministry of the unfaithful shepherd (as embodied in the false prophets of Jerusalem). As we turn now to Micah 3:5, we shall observe that it is in fact God’s revealed will that unfaithful shepherds be marked and identified so that the sheep might flee from them to faithful shepherds. The main points are the following: (1) The Characteristics of Unfaithful Ministers; (2) Two Unfaithful Ministers Exemplified; (3) Implications Concerning Unfaithful Ministers.

### **I. The Characteristics of Unfaithful Ministers (Micah 3:5,11).**

A. Dear ones, if we are to exercise sound and righteous judgment in this all-important matter, we must first know what characterizes an unfaithful minister. We consider in this sermon one characteristic and will another characteristic in the following sermon.

B. The Unfaithful Minister Leads God’s People into Error: “Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people err” (Micah 3:5). This deplorable characteristic is noted by other Old Testament prophets as well (Isaiah 9:16—Isaiah was a contemporary of Micah; Jeremiah 50:6).

1. The false prophets of Jerusalem against whom Micah brings his prophecy professed to worship Jehovah, claimed to speak in God’s name, and were within the visible church of that age. That is why they were so dangerous to the people of God. They had enough of the truth to make their error sound reasonable. Listen to what the Lord says through the prophet Jeremiah concerning these false prophets (Jeremiah 23:32).

2. Dear ones, if there is one characteristic that above all others describes the unfaithful minister, it is that he leads the sheep into scandalous error. The primary duty of a shepherd in regard to his sheep is to feed them good food and to protect them from all enemies. Thus, if the shepherd feeds the sheep poison, so that they become ill or leaves them in the field to be attacked by wolves, he has gravely failed in his duty as a shepherd. Likewise, a minister proves to be unfaithful to that office which Christ has ordained when he either teaches what is heretical to his sheep or allows false teachers to lead the sheep astray without warning them of the impending danger to their souls.

3. Now since we do not assume that a minister (even a faithful minister) is without error in an absolute sense (for no minister upon earth has the mind of God absolutely), when does a minister become an unfaithful minister by leading the flock into error? I would submit to you that a minister becomes

scandalously unfaithful when he departs from the body of biblical truth contained in faithful Confessions, Catechisms, and Covenants of the Reformed Churches (e.g. The Westminster Standards). At that point a minister has introduced heresy of a destructive nature into the church and should be marked out as an unfaithful minister. Allow two of the most godly and learned ministers of the Church of Scotland in her purest times to explain this in their own words.

a. First, Mr. Gillespie defines a heresy as follows (“Miscellany Questions”, p. 49):

Heresy is a gross and dangerous error, voluntarily held and factiously maintained by some person or persons within the visible church, in opposition to some chief or substantial truth or truths grounded upon and drawn from the holy Scripture by necessary consequence.

Since heresy is an opposition maintained against "some chief or substantial truth or truths", Mr. Gillespie (pp. 47,48) identifies for us what he and the Reformed divines at that time understood as "chief or substantial truths."

But if you understand by fundamental truths all the chief and substantial principles, (I do not mean only the first rudiments, or A, B, C, of a catechism, which we, first of all, put to new beginners, but I mean all such truths as are commonly put in the confessions of faith, and in the more full and large catechisms of the reformed churches, or all such truths as all and every one who lives in a true Christian reformed church are commanded and required to learn and know....

In other words, according to Mr. Gillespie, an heretical minister, or an heretical church is one which has voluntarily departed from the truths commonly contained in faithful Reformed standards (such as the subordinate standards emitted by Westminster Assembly). That is not to say that unfaithful teachers, pastors, or churches are not faithful in any sense, nor is it to say that those who are unfaithful in the sense that Mr. Gillespie describes above cannot be Christians (for as Mr. Gillespie points out, just as Christians may be guilty of known sin in life, so they may be guilty of known heresy in doctrine, worship, or government). However, in the present unsettled state of the church, where there is neither a National Reformed Church nor a National Reformed Confession established by law which can judicially try the various departures from biblical truth as contained in faithful Reformed standards, we must carry on the work of testifying against all departures from these truths, of avoiding association with ministers and churches that depart from these truths, of keeping those from the communion table who maintain such errors in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, and of earnestly praying that Christ would restore a biblical and covenanted uniformity within His church in each nation.

b. Furthermore, I would cite a second witness who also believed that false teachers were not limited to those who denied the fundamentals of the faith, but rather included those who departed from the established doctrine of truth. Mr. Samuel Rutherford (*A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty of Conscience*, pp. 72,73, states:

We see no reason why none should be false teachers, but such only as deny fundamentals, and that pertinaciously [i.e. obstinately—GLP], though these by Divines be called Heretics. 1. Rom. 16:17. Paul saith, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them", then as we are not to distinguish where the Law and the Word of God does not distinguish, so we are to count them false teachers, who lead in a faction in the Church, contrary to any doctrine of truth, whether fundamental or not fundamental, and to avoid them as Seducers. . . .

All such departures from the truth are scandalous errors and when such scandalous errors are maintained by

ministers or churches, they mark themselves out to be unfaithful and unworthy to be heard as faithful ministers or churches.

4. This was precisely the test which God gave to His people from of old by which to evaluate those who claimed to be His ministers (Deuteronomy 13:1-3; Romans 16:17). Even a great following or great signs and wonders are no mark of a faithful minister if he leads the people into error—for the Lord is testing His people to see if they will hearken unto Him or unto man. The Lord has warned us about following the crowd or following signs rather than following the pure doctrine of His Word (Matthew 24:11,24).

## II. Two Unfaithful Ministers Exemplified

A. I would warn you concerning two unfaithful ministers who have a vast following today. I derive no great joy from specifically identifying such men, but it becomes necessary when so many are being led away from the pure doctrine and worship of Christ.

B. Arminianism in doctrine and Arminianism in worship pervade these two ministers (i.e. a man-centered gospel which uses all the methods of the world to bring people to Christ and a man-centered worship that appeals to the appetites and senses of man).

1. The first minister is Billy Graham.

a. Billy Graham like no one else within the professing evangelical church has been used to break down the hedge of sound doctrine so as to make perversion of the truth an acceptable option and so as to bring about a perverted unity founded upon gross error (interestingly Mr. Graham is an ardent supporter of Promise Keepers whose methods and goals are one and the same).

b. He has consistently invited liberals who deny cardinal doctrines of the faith (like the inspiration of Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of the virgin birth) to participate in his crusades. For example, in Mr. Graham's Detroit Crusade in 1960, he invited Bishop Pike to lead in prayer, even though Bishop Pike denied fundamental doctrines of the faith.

(1) The magazine, *Christianity Today* (of which Mr. Graham sits as chairman of the board) reports in its November 13, 1995 issue that Mr. Graham had attended major assemblies of the World Council of Churches [the most liberal assembly of churches in the world—GLP] since 1948 and professed to be "thrilled at the whole process of seeing world churchmen sitting down together, praying together, discussing together."

(2) Furthermore, Mr. Graham was quoted as saying in a magazine entitled, *Protestant Church Life* (September 29, 1956):

We're coming to New York, not to clean it up, but to get people to dedicate themselves to God, and then send them back to their own churches—Catholic, Protestant [remember this includes those churches and ministers in the WCC—GLP], or Jewish . . . The rest is up to God.

(3) Finally, if there be any doubt concerning Mr. Graham's seducing doctrine, listen to the glowing approval given by him to the papal antichrist of Rome (The Jan/Feb 1980 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*):

Since his election, Pope John Paul II has emerged as the greatest religious leader of the modern world, and one of the greatest moral and spiritual leaders of this century.

2. Secondly, I warn you concerning the ministry of the pope of the Harlot Church of Rome and all her daughter churches that imitate her poisonous doctrine, worship, and government (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, 9-12).

a. Beware in these last days of the miraculous signs and wonders that will be

forthcoming from the Romish Church in fulfillment of prophecy in Revelation 13:11-15 (or for that matter signs and wonders from any minister or church that has fallen away from the biblical truths established in faithful Reformed Confessions, Catechisms, and Covenants).

b. Beware of following the masses of people who hearken unto the voice of the false prophet of Rome (which according to Revelation 13 will comprise the majority of ministers and churches within at least the Western world if not the entire world).

### III. Implications concerning Unfaithful Ministers

A. All unfaithful ministers will in some way use (or misuse) the Word of God to support their error. One is not a faithful minister simply because he claims to appeal to the Word of God. Dear ones, Satan appealed to the Word of God in his tempting of Christ (Matthew 4:6). There is actually a greater danger among those who appeal to Scripture and yet pervert it to their own selfish ends (2 Peter 3:16). To not interpret the doctrine of Christ and the apostles as the Holy Spirit intended is to disobey Christ.

B. Unfaithful ministers or churches may either actively or passively reject the scriptural truths found in our Confessional standards.

1. On the one hand, the truth is actively rejected when a minister or church verbally renounces or attacks it (after having heard it presented). For example, when ministers and churches omit or amend the biblical teaching contained within the faithful Confessions, Catechisms, and Covenants of their forefathers, they actively reject the truth.

2. On the other hand, the truth is passively rejected when a minister or church does not verbally renounce or attack it, but yet continues to practice and teach the contrary error (as if the truth had never been presented to him). For example, when ministers and churches leave unaltered the biblical teaching contained within the faithful Confessions and Catechisms of their forefathers, and yet maintain and uphold contrary practices, they passively reject the truth. I submit to you that a passive rejection of the truth is far more subtle and therefore more dangerous.

C. Believers are commanded to withdraw from the ministry of all such unfaithful ministers and churches (Proverbs 19:27; Proverbs 14:7; 1 Timothy 6:3,5b). Listen to the words of James Renwick that faithful minister and martyr for the Covenanted Cause of Christ in Scotland who defended the right and duty of individual believers to withdraw from unfaithful ministers (*The Life and Letters of James Renwick*, p.139):

If this [right of private judgment—GLP] belongs not to the people, they have nothing but blind implicit faith; and what better are they than Papists, who must believe as the church believes? Yea, hath not every Christian a judgment of discretion, even in reference to actions of others? ... But some (I know) say, that withdrawing from a scandalous person is a censuring of a scandalous person, and to withdraw from a scandalous minister is to depose him, and make him no minister. But this I deny; for simple withdrawing is not the inflicting of a censure, but only the believer's testifying their sense, that a censure should be inflicted (to wit) by such as are competent: and this is warranted by Scripture, Rom. 16:17; Eph. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:14, and many such like places.

Renwick in the same section just quoted then cites Samuel Rutherford (from Rutherford's, *Peaceable Plea for Paul's Presbytery*) to the same effect:

Any private person may take that care for the safety of their souls, that they may do for the safety of their bodies ... Now, I say private separation from scandalous persons is not depriving [i.e. deposing—GLP] of them, if they be pastors; nor excommunicating of them, if they be

professors [i.e. professing Christians—GLP]. For the latter [i.e. deposing a minister or excommunicating a member—GLP] is an act of authority, belonging to those to whom Christ hath given the keys; but the former [i.e. a withdrawal or separation—GLP] is an act natural, belonging to every believer.

D. Perhaps the saddest thing about the ministry of unfaithful ministers is that the professing people of God love it that way (Jeremiah 5:31; 2 Timothy 4:3). If God's people would not support by their attendance or by their finances those ministers who are unfaithful, but rather would plead to the Lord for faithful ministers and when they find them to wholeheartedly support them, the cause of Christ would flourish. Calvin notes in his *Commentary on Micah* (p. 233), "no one is ever deceived, except through his own will."

E. How will you keep yourself from deception?

1. Embrace Christ freely offered to you in the gospel, apart from all human effort or good works.
2. Pray that you might know in your soul an insatiable hungering and thirsting to know the truth of Christ. Cultivate a daily communion with Christ (John 10:4).
3. Prove all things by the Holy Scriptures (Acts 17:11).
4. Walk in the Light and hold fast to that which you have already attained, for as you walk in the light which God has already given you, you shall gain more light (Psalm 36:9; John 7:17).

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