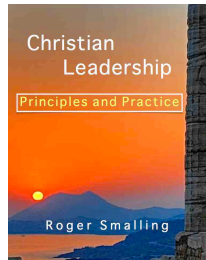


Dealing with Wolves

by
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Acts 20:28-31

This article corresponds to the book
[Christian Leadership](#)
available in Kindle.



One of the key functions of the New Testament Elder is to watch out for those that may destroy the flock. Such persons who may come in to provoke divisions and/or steal sheep are termed *wolves*. Paul had to fight wolves constantly and we do too. He had his legalists. Today we have false Christians and cults.

Two kinds of wolves

Exterior

For I know this that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Acts 20:29

Paul spoke about wolves as being a certainty. Notice they usually wait until the leader is absent to enter. They realize the leader is likely to have discernment to spot them. The phrase "enter in" shows that they are from outside the congregation. These are usually false cults and can be dealt with by warning the people in advance about what are those cults: Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, etc. These wolves are usually recognizable by name and are therefore not as dangerous as the other kind. Simple instruction to the congregation about which groups to watch out for, is usually sufficient.

Interior

Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. Acts 20:30

These are the most dangerous kind, because they are already in the church, and therefore the most difficult to deal with.

They have pride and ambition in their hearts.¹ They are dissatisfied for some reason and the devil begins to use them to draw away a following after them, rather than after Christ.

Both external and internal wolves are usually self-deceived and therefore do not see themselves as wolves. 2Tim.3:13

Why does God allow wolves to come into the church?

No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. 1Cor. 11:19

At no time will you learn more about the people under your charge than when wolves come in. Their loyalty, stability, and maturity will be put to the test. People you thought you could build on, may be a disappointment. Others that you thought were weak will prove to be stronger than you thought.

How to recognize wolves

- They always operate behind the backs of the leaders. Jn. 10:1-2
- They will often visit individuals in their homes without the knowledge of the church leaders.
- They will try to obtain authority or position in the church without going through the leaders. Jesus taught that they come disguised as sheep. Mt. 7:15-17
- A simple key to detect them is when they begin to steal sheep: Sheep don't steal sheep. Wolves do.
- They are critical of the leaders, often behind their backs. 2Jn.9-10
- Everyone has weaknesses in his ministry. This does not grant people the right to criticize. At times, a wolf may make accurate criticisms. This does not justify undermining the ministry of a person, especially to weaker members of the church. Note what wolves said about Paul in 2Cor. 10:10.
- They boast of their own spirituality. 2Cor. 10:12. However, Paul sarcastically mocks the spiritual pride of these wolves. They are often

comparing themselves with others and the comparisons always seem to turn out in their favor. They frequently claim to have more insight on some things than the leaders and may imply that they have more to teach than the leader. 2Thess. 3:6

- They tend to provoke division. They invariably seek out weaker believers. Wolves seem to have an internal radar by which they detect weak believers. It may be a satanic form of discernment. They will invariably go straight for the weak believer and try to impress them. Ro. 16:18

How to deal with wolves

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. Titus 3:10

Rebuking and rejecting

With nearly any other kind of problem you normally demonstrate patience, compassion and mercy, but not so with wolves. You must show no patience, compassion, or mercy.

Paul's instructions are clear: a wolf does not deserve more than two rebukes before throwing them out. Be very firm with them. Example: A person from a sect comes into your church. He sits quietly and makes no disturbance but after the meeting sidles over to some weak believers. You discover he is getting addresses. You take him aside and warn him. He returns another time and does the same. Again you warn him and make it clear that one more offense and you will have to close the door to him. Again he ignores you.

You then tell him to leave and not come back. A warning from the pulpit to the people may be necessary.

Running interference

The whole church, especially the mature believers should be trained in how to run interference when a wolf enters.

This means simply intercepting the wolf before he or she has an opportunity to get to the weaker ones after the meeting. They may engage them in conversation so that they will not have opportunity to do damage. All mature believers in the church should understand that they can be called upon to do such interception if necessary.

Smalling's articles and essays are available at www.smallings.com

¹ James 3:14-16