



## Three Ways to Spot a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

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One of the methods bank tellers and merchants learn in order to distinguish real money from counterfeit bills is to examine genuine \$100 bills over and over again so that they will be more likely to spot the counterfeit bills when they see them.

In the same way, we can learn to recognize destructive people by knowing what to look for.

Some may object to any attempt to identify wolves among us because it sounds uncharitable and judgmental to call someone a wolf.

Only Jesus knows a person's heart so who are we to judge?

Yet, Jesus himself warns us in Matthew 7:15 that there are those who claim to be believers, they may even be leaders in the church, but they are vicious or ravenous wolves dressed up in sheep's clothing

The apostle Paul warns Timothy that there will be people who act religious but are puffed up with pride, who are unloving, unforgiving, slanderous, and cruel (2 Timothy 3:2-9).

Part of spiritual maturity is gaining the ability to discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14). Why is this necessary? Because Paul reminds us that even Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Evil pretends to be good, especially among church folk.

Sometimes as Christian counselors we make a naive assumption and it gets us into terrible trouble. We assume that if someone claims to be a Christian, talks like a Christian, and knows biblical principles, that means he or she is a committed Christian.

That's not true.

Just like there are counterfeit \$100 bills that attempt to pass for the real thing, there are those among us who attempt to pass for Christians but underneath they are ravenous wolves. How do we tell the difference?

Jesus said by their fruit we will know them. A wolf can be an expert at talking like a Christian but over time, when you observe his or her behaviors, they look more wolfish (aggressive). As the saying goes, the sweetest tongue often has the sharpest tooth.

Here are three things to watch out for.

1. Wolves live for the love of power rather than the power of love. Wolves refuse accountability and resist submission to authority. You've heard the phrase *lone wolf*? Wolves in sheep's clothing put themselves as their highest point of reference. They often use charisma and charm to "win" people over but they do not have mutual or reciprocal relationships. People are to be used, possessed, exploited, or controlled rather than loved.
2. Wolves look like sheep and talk like sheep but they bite like wolves, especially when the sheep are disagreeing or dissenting. Winning and being right are their highest values and wolves do whatever they need to in order to stay "on top". When operating in church or religious settings their methods are often underhanded and cunning in order to appear less aggressive. They don't want to look like wolves, that's why they pretend to be sheep.

So pay attention. When you challenge or confront a client what happens? Is he humble? Reflective? Willing to consider what you are saying? Or does he bristle, attack you, deflect, or blame?

Remember, when someone willingly comes for counseling, he or she is asking for your help. When you try to give it to him, does he receive it or is their presence in counseling for a different purpose?

3. Wolves are experts at deceit. That's why they are successful at looking like sheep. Wolves pretend to be good and care about the sheep but those closest to them (their family) know the truth. They've been bitten again and again and again.

But the wolf's ability to maintain his cover is one reason why it's so difficult for church leadership (including Christian counselors) to believe the person (sheep) who has been wounded by the wolf.

Those in charge fail to see him as a wolf and assume that what is happening is merely two sheep biting one another.

Look again. Look harder. Wolves have much sharper teeth and stronger jaws than sheep do. A sheep cannot harm a wolf even if he pretends he's wounded. A wolf kills the sheep.

It's interesting that God chose a wolf as a poignant word picture to portray this type of person who lives among us. A wolf is a predator. It has a strong jaw and 42 sharp teeth designed to stab its prey to death. The Bible warns us that, "reckless words pierce like a sword (Proverbs 12:18). Verbal abuse is real and when regularly exercised, lethal to the person being pierced by it.

Let's not naively close our eyes and think that there are no wolves in our churches. They are everywhere. And we are mandated by God to have our senses trained to discern the difference between good and evil precisely because evil pretends to look good.