Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing

By Curt W. Buckmire

The July 31, 2007 newsletter from Christianity Today entitled Sorrow but No Regrets really struck a nerve with me. The opening paragraph started with, “Many of us have been hurt by the church at one time or another—a respected church leader disappoints us, church members spread gossip and rumors, or new leaders cause disagreements and division.” While I will concede that many of us have been hurt in church at one time or another, I would like to take a moment to examine exactly who may be doing the hurting.

When talking about the church, we always seem to overlook that fact that not everyone that attends church is a Christian as per one of the definitions of the word—manifesting the qualities or spirit of Christ; Christ like. As an institution, the church is open and accessible to anyone and everyone that desires to attend. You simply cannot take it for granted that a member of any church is a Christian, even if they are in a position of leadership. The sad reality is that for many of our churches today, manifesting the qualities of Christ is not one of the requirements for leadership.

When we examine the scriptures, we find that Jesus warned us about some of the individuals that would be in the church that didn’t reflect His character. In John 10:11-14 (NKJV), Jesus talks about those who are in the church for self gain. The scripture states, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.” While Jesus, being the good shepherd, is prepared to give his life for His sheep, the hireling in contrast is only concerned about themselves and what they can get out of the situation. As the scripture states, a hireling has no concern for the sheep and at the first sign of danger; they run away leaving the sheep to fend for themselves. In the scriptures, the sheep is used as a metaphor for the church.

In another passage of scripture, Jesus warns us about the false prophets to come. Matthew 7:15-16 (NKJV) reads, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.” False prophets are individuals that appear to have the Word of God in their mouths, but over a period of time their actions fail to line up with their words. I have learned to be a fruit inspector; no longer just listening to what individuals say but I look to see if their actions line up with their words. Examining a person’s actions as compared to their words will save you a lot of pain and heartache in the long run.

Even if we were to eliminate those individuals that are actively working to detract from the mission of the church, namely to make disciples for Jesus the Christ; we still have to deal with fact that ultimately everyone that attends church is still a work in progress. One of the reasons we attend church is to help us become better people. However, while we are working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, as instructed by Philippians 2:12, we are still in a position where we may hurt other people. The only difference here is that it’s usually not intentional and once brought to the person’s attention they try to make amends for their actions.

The next time you are hurt by a person in the church, and more likely than not there will be a next time; remember that there are many people in the church who claim to be Christians who do not bear the fruits of being Christ like. Don’t let it cause you to become bitter and leave the church. You should bring your hurt feelings to the attention of the person that committed the transgression and if they are a Christian
they will try to do what is right from a Biblical perspective; otherwise, you will know that they are just wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Curt Buckmire is the Senior Pastor of Spirit and Truth Worship Center in Loganville. You may respond to this article or send your questions to pastorcurt@satwc.org.