

## The Unfaithful Minister Described #2

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Micah 3:5-7

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One of the sacred idols of this present age is that of toleration. At the expense of truth, ministers conspire together to make their message and testimony broad enough to tolerate scandalous departures from the Word of God and from faithful Reformed Confessions and Catechisms. Preaching for the approval of men, preaching to flatter men, preaching to promote the agenda of men is a prominent characteristic of an unfaithful minister. Listen to a few words found in the following interview which illustrates this conspiracy of unfaithful ministers who preach for the approval of men. I have taken excerpts from an interview wherein Mr. Robert Schuller interviewed Mr. Billy Graham on May 31, 1997:

Mr. Schuller asks: "Tell me, what do you think is the future of Christianity?"

Mr. Graham responds: "I think James answered that, the Apostle James in the first council in Jerusalem, when he said that God's purpose for this age is to call out a people for His name. And that's what God is doing today. He's calling people out of the world for His name, whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world, or the Christian world or the non-believing world, they are members of the Body of Christ because they've been called by God. They may not ever know the name of Jesus but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don't have, and they turn to the only light that they have, and I think they are saved, and that they're going to be with us in heaven."

Mr. Schuller clarifies: "What I hear you saying [is—GLP] that it's possible for Jesus Christ to come into human hearts and soul and life, even if they've been born in darkness and have never had exposure to the Bible. Is that a correct interpretation of what you're saying?"

Mr. Graham states: "Yes, it is .... I've met people in various parts of the world in tribal situations, that ... have never seen a Bible or heard about a Bible, and never heard of Jesus, but they've believed in their hearts that there was a God, and they've tried to live a life that was quite apart from the surrounding community in which they lived."

Mr. Schuller summarizes: "I'm so thrilled to hear you say this. There's a wideness in God's mercy."

Mr. Graham concludes: "There is. There definitely is."

The Lord Jesus never describes such heresy as a wideness in God's mercy, but rather as a broad way wherein many are led to destruction.

Last Lord's Day we considered the first characteristic of an unfaithful minister identified by the prophet Micah (3:5): the unfaithful minister leads people into scandalous error in departing from the Word of God and from the form of sound words as summarized in faithful Confessions and Catechisms. This Lord's Day we continue in our study of the unfaithful minister by observing the following main points: (1) Two More Characteristics of Unfaithful Ministers; (2) Divine Judgments upon Unfaithful Ministers; (3) Two Objections Answered.

### I. Two More Characteristics of Unfaithful Ministers.

A. Unfaithful Ministers Seek Their Own Profit (Micah 3:5: "that bite with their teeth, and cry,

Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him”).

1. Micah having marked out the unfaithful prophets of his day as causing God’s people to err, now contends that in addition to their scandalous departures from the truth they look not to the glory of God nor to the profit of the sheep, but to their own selfish gain. In graphic language Micah displays the greed that motivates these false prophets. They “bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace” (i.e. as long as their greed and lust are satisfied, they are content to pronounce the blessing of peace upon the people). The language Micah uses points again to the animal-like behavior that is prominent among unfaithful ministers. But Micah also says concerning these scandalous prophets that “he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him” (i.e. the faithful who would dare oppose these false shepherds and not follow them into their error, nor support their ministry, they attack with a personal vengeance and retaliation).

2. One of the characteristics of a faithful minister is that he is not given to greed or covetousness (1 Timothy 3:3). “Filthy lucre” refers to shameful profit or gain (“lucre” comes from the Latin word *lucrum* which means profit or gain). Ministers must not only be evaluated according to their doctrine, but also according to their life and practice (this area of greed is simply one example of other moral and ethical qualities that should be evident in the life, conversation, and family of a minister).

3. There is certainly no shameful profit or gain in a minister who desires that his family’s earthly needs be cared for so that he might devote his full time to the ministry of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:13-14; see also Galatians 6:6). In fact, this is to the great advantage of the flock. An indication of a congregation’s love for the Word is directly proportionate to their desire to provide an adequate salary for a faithful minister.

4. The prophet Isaiah (a contemporary of Micah) also addresses the scandalous greed of the unfaithful shepherds of that time (Isaiah 56:11). Remember how Balaam is held up in Scripture as an unfaithful prophet because he was lured by his greed and covetousness to accept a bribe from Balak the king, who desired Balaam to pronounce a curse against Israel (2 Pet.2:15; Revelation 2:14). Remember how Simon the sorcerer sought to buy the office of minister from Peter and was condemned by Peter in these words: “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money” (Acts 8:20). Remember the charge of the Reformers against the scandalous profiteering of the Romish Church wherein that harlot Church robbed the poor by selling pieces of paper called “indulgences”, which Rome wickedly claimed would deliver people from the fires of purgatory, but which only provided the means whereby Rome wallowed in wanton luxury and built ornate cathedrals while the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the injured languished in desperate need.

5. Although greed for financial gain is one conspicuous characteristic of an unfaithful shepherd, greed and covetousness may manifest themselves in other ways as well.

a. Greed for power (through tyranny, manipulation, and deception). A church government that is centralized in one man reveals greed for power even though there may be other elders.

b. Greed for man’s approval (tickling the ears of those who come with what they want to hear, avoiding doctrines that may offend people, keeping a very positive message that makes people feel good about themselves, refusing to address the sins and errors of the age, taking surveys to determine what kind of worship service the people want).

c. Greed for prestige (demanding that specific titles of honor be used when addressing them, such as Doctor, Reverend). Titles of respect are not wrong in themselves, but faithful ministers must be sure they are not coveting the title in order to be seen by man. Consider the words of the Lord in Matthew 23:7-12.

d. Greed for a large following. Faithful ministers must be careful that they do not fall into the snare of believing that growth is due to their sufficiency and giftedness. “He must increase, but I must decrease”, John said of himself in comparison to Christ. A faithful minister is to be a voice crying in the

wilderness, not a ring leader at a circus celebrating the greatest show on earth, nor a talk show host, nor a comedian.

e. Greed for self-serving knowledge. Knowledge without love puffs up, but knowledge with love builds up. The faithful minister through his academic degrees does not draw attention to himself, but rather through the knowledge and training he has gained, the faithful minister draws attention to Christ.

f. Greed for unity (apart from uniformity in doctrine, worship, and government). This is a “unity” at the expense of truth and is a toleration of scandalous error as if unity was more foundational than truth (“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” Amos 3:3).

6. Each of these forms of greed is condemned by the words of Paul in Romans 16:18 and Philippians 3:19.

B. The final Characteristic of Unfaithful Ministers cited by the prophet Micah is the following: Unfaithful Ministers Trust In Mere External Forms of Religion (Micah 3:11: “The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us”).

1. In spite of the gross defection of these false prophets in doctrine and life, they yet maintained from within the walls of the visible church at that time that the Lord was among them. How could anyone follow such unfaithful shepherds after all that we have noted concerning them? They did so for the three following reasons.

a. Because they professed to “lean upon the LORD.” They spoke in the name of the Lord. They professed to believe in and follow the Lord. They were recognized to be ministers within the Jewish Church. Thus, the mere outward form of office they claimed to hold secured a hearing from the people. How we are warned herein not to simply look to the title or office that a man claims to hold as proof of his calling or proof of his message. We have been instructed to be Bereans and to look to the doctrine and to the life of those professing to be faithful ministers. Everything else will lead us into deception and delusion. Rome claims for its pope the office of the Vicar of Christ. Rome claims to have apostolic succession for the papacy. So what? Although the claim is false; nevertheless, even if the claim were true, if the pope has descended from Peter, but destroys the apostolic doctrine of Peter, are we to follow him? If I claim to be a minister of Christ, but by my doctrine and practice deny the doctrine and worship of Christ, I make a false claim. This is true of many who claim to be faithful ministers today, but their claim is false if their doctrine and life are scandalous.

b. The false prophets were followed because they said “is not the Lord among us?” These scandalous shepherds were able to mislead the people of God because they appealed to the outward form of the true religion. “The Lord is among us because we yet have the temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the ceremonies, the law, and the prophets; therefore the Lord must be among us.” How we will be deceived if we merely look to the outward forms of the Christian Religion. If ministers take pride in the outward name of Presbyterian or Reformed, but adopt an altered Confession of Faith from that adopted by the Westminster Assembly and Church of Scotland or on the other hand disown or ignore the Solemn League and Covenant sworn by our Presbyterian and Reformed forefathers on our behalf, such ministers are appealing more to a mere name than to the truth for which our faithful forefathers fought and for which they suffered and died. Oh, beloved, how we must always take heed to ourselves that we do not allow our purity of worship to become a mere formalism. We must worship the Lord only as he has commanded, but we must never forget who we worship by these divinely appointed forms. If Joab (in 1 Kings 2:28) was not preserved from death when he fled to the temple and clung to the horns of the brazen altar from the wrath of King Solomon, if the mere outward forms of religion would not save him, neither will they save us. If our hearts do not express in our worship our love of God, fear of the Lord, joy in the Holy Ghost, faith in Jesus Christ, communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, our worship is as vain as that of the Pharisees.

c. The scandalous ministers of Micah's time were followed because they promised, "none evil can come upon us." They told the people what they wanted to hear. They promised outward peace and security while God was threatening judgment upon the nation and church for gross defection from the Lord their God. A people that flock to hear a minister for his positive up-beat message, are a people you can count on being deceived. Dear ones, if we cannot sweat and squirm in our seats under the conviction of the Holy Spirit of God when God speaks to us through the preached Word and be thankful for it, we are prime candidates for deception. The gospel is preached in all of its power and glory by a minister that is under no self-serving constraints or bribes of man, but freely declares the gospel of salvation to all without respect of person. A bribed gospel is not a free gospel. A minister's only constraint in preaching the gospel is the love and fear of the almighty, holy, and merciful God who commissioned him.

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