

Shibboleth

An episode of “West Wing” (a TV show) broadcast in late November of 2000 presented a situation in which the INS (Immigration & Naturalization) discovered a group of Chinese refugees hidden in a container on a cargo ship off the coast of California. U.S. law said they should be sent back to China, but word came to the White House that the refugees claimed to be evangelical Christians and sought asylum from persecution. The script had the President ordering that one of the refugees be brought to him so that he could determine if the person could say “shibboleth”, which he explained was a test used in the Bible to distinguish authentic people from those who are false or counterfeit. The Bible reference is to a passage in Judges (12:5-6), and it involves a man named Jephthah. While seemingly obscure, you should note, first that Jephthah is one of the people named in Hebrews 11 (the roll call of the faithful), and second, that Jephthah was the leader of the people of Gilead (as in “There is a balm in Gilead”) and third, that about Jephthah it is said (Judges 11:29) that “God’s Spirit was on him”. The reference indicates that Jephthah’s men were able to distinguish those who were their friends from those who were their enemy by whether or not they could properly pronounce the word “shibboleth”.

In several places, Jesus warns his disciples about being careful not to be deceived by false leaders (Matt 10:16; 16:1-12; 24:23-25), and in 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul writes a lot on the same subject. It is, then, a fair question to ask: what does/can someone say or do to show that he (or she) is a Christian--to show that he (or she) is worth listening to? To say this another way: how do you recognize authentic leaders for or in the church? A review of 1 and 2 Corinthians suggests the following:

1	1 Cor 1:10 (and 1 Cor 12)	
2	1 Cor 2:1-5	
3	1 Cor 3:1-4	
4	1 Cor 3:5-15	
5	1 Cor 3:16-17	
6	1 Cor 4:1-6	
7	1 Cor 4:18-21 2 Cor 13:1-3	
8	1 Cor 8:13 1 Cor 9:15 1 Cor 9:19-23	
9	1 Cor 14:26 2 Cor 10:8 2 Cor 13:10	
10	2 Cor 3:4-6 2 Cor 3:18-4:1	

11	2 Cor 5:6-8	
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12	2 Cor 5:16-21	
13	2 Cor 10:1-12:10, esp. 12:9	
14	2 Cor 12:14,15 2 Cor 13:7,9	
15	2 Cor 13:8	