

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)	Does the person look for ways to encourage and build unity, <u>or</u> does the person encourage factions and fighting?
2	1 Cor 2:1-5	Does the person claim special knowledge or seek to impress others with credentials or with brilliance, <u>or</u> does the person offer what he (or she) knows about Jesus in humility?
3	1 Cor 3:1-4	Does the person encourage people to grow and mature spiritually, <u>or</u> does the person encourage dependence on him (or her)?
4	1 Cor 3:5-15	Does the person take credit for the things that happen, <u>or</u> does the person make it clear that he (or she) understands that it is God who gives growth?
5	1 Cor 3:16-17	Does the person respect the value of every believer, <u>or</u> does the person value only a select group, such as only those who agree with him (or her)?
6	1 Cor 4:1-6	Does the person have a spirit of servanthood and stewardship, <u>or</u> does the person seem filled with his (or her) own importance and make comparisons to the detriment of others?
7	1 Cor 4:18-21 2 Cor 13:1-3	Does the person care enough to confront, in a spirit of love, others who may be on a wrong path, <u>or</u> if the person confronts at all, is it done with condemnation or condescension or contempt?
8	1 Cor 8:13 1 Cor 9:15 1 Cor 9:19-23	Does the person claim rights and privileges, <u>or</u> does the person forego rights in order to place no barriers in the way of others coming to faith in Jesus?
9	1 Cor 14:26 2 Cor 10:8 2 Cor 13:10	Does the person use his (or her) stature and authority to build people up <u>or</u> to knock people down--to build up community among believers <u>or</u> to tear down community among believers?
10	2 Cor 3:4-6 2 Cor 3:18-4:1	Does the person glory in himself (or herself), <u>or</u> does the person reflect the glory of the Lord--does time in the presence of this person lead you to say, “Wow, what an amazing person!” <u>or</u> does such time lead you to say, “My goodness, I never saw God and God’s messages so clearly!”?
11	2 Cor 5:6-8	Does the person radiate confidence in every situation, always connecting that confidence to faith in God’s sovereignty, <u>or</u> does the person invite others to have confidence in his (or her) ideas and his (or her) guidance of others?

12	2 Cor 5:16-21	Does the person carry himself (or herself) as God's ambassador, <u>or</u> does the person put himself (or herself) in the spotlight?
13	2 Cor 10:1-12:10, esp. 12:9	Does the person boast about his (or her) own achievements, <u>or</u> does the person boast about what God has been able to do in his (or her) life with a less than perfect subject?
14	2 Cor 12:14,15 2 Cor 13:7,9	Does the person want your possessions, <u>or</u> does the person want you to be right with God?
15	2 Cor 13:8	Does the person pursue truth, <u>or</u> does the person demand that you agree with everything he (or she) says?