

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Deceit is believing something that is not true. It is, perhaps, the most effective tool of Satan for the destruction of mankind. For thousands of years, the world at large recognized the existence of gods, albeit pagan ones. Whether they worshipped gods out of some sense of good intentions or for the practice of wickedness, the fact that spirit beings existed was never in doubt. The same is true today. Regardless of the religion, most people (I would like to hope) have good intentions in the gods they worship. But they are, sadly, deceived.

It is Satan “who deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9). Why? He is intent upon keeping them from eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Destroying people physically would accomplish nothing. Only by searing their conscience against love and obedience to the true God through repentance can their citizenship in the eternal Kingdom be taken away.

But make no mistake, being deceived is easier than anyone would like to believe. Even with the presence of Jesus Christ on earth, *many* people will be deceived by Satan. Notice what happens to the multitudes of Gog and Magog:

REVELATION 20:7-9 Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, **Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.** 9 They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And **fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.**

I have to admit, I cannot understand how so great a multitude—“whose number is as the sand of the sea”—are deceived into fighting against God. It is the Father who sends fire down from heaven to destroy Gog and Magog. Certain nations may simply be more prone to evil works and that makes them more easily deceived by Satan. One example is the so-called Palestinians. Their heritage is not fully understood but they are not Arabs. Perhaps they are descended from the Amalekites who have been trying to destroy the Israelites since the time of Moses and Esther. Regardless, Gog and Magog are a *lot* of people whom God destroys.

Avoiding being deceived is the most important warning of Jesus Christ to believers. Notice these verses from the Olivet prophecy:

MATTHEW 24:4-5, 11, 23-24 And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. 5 “For **many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.** ... 11 “Then **many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.** ... 23 “Then **if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it.** 24 “For **false christs and false prophets will rise** and show great signs and wonders **to deceive**, if possible, even the elect.

Four times Jesus warned against FALSE christs and FALSE prophets. The fact that they WILL “deceive **many**” should make believers take this very seriously. But who are these false christs and false prophets?

The word *christ* simply means *anointed*. God anoints someone for a particular work or service. This was the case with Aaron, Elijah, Elisha, David, et al, who were kings, leaders, and prophets. A *false* christ or prophet is someone who was not anointed by God but assumes a role they were NOT given. They have one purpose—to take away eternal life from mankind. To accomplish that, false christ and prophets have some amount of LEGITIMACY in the eyes of believers!

**TITUS 1:10 For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,**

Let that sink in. Jesus Christ said there will be many false christ and false prophets among God's people who will deceive many believers! These are not unknown politicians or the global elite—they are personally known to believers. John calls deceivers *antichrists* because they work against Jesus Christ:

**2 JOHN 1:7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.**

This causes me great concern, both for myself and my brethren. How can anyone know if they are deceived? The answer is we CANNOT if we rely upon ourselves alone. Only God can remove deception because His Word is Truth<sup>1</sup>. But God will not keep His people from deception if they put themselves at risk of being deceived. The Bible gives several cases of deception that comes from within the Body of Christ. The first example involves the biggest problem within the Body of Christ—offenses:

**ROMANS 16:17-18 Now I [*Paul*] urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.**

**18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.**

Without a doubt, offenses have caused the greatest divisions among believers. Why? BECAUSE MOST OF THEM ARE NEVER RECONCILED! Whether it is a leader of an organization or among believers, offenses have divided the Body of Christ into hundreds if not thousands of groups. Divisions are even the result of many so-called *sermons*! Who has not heard a preacher say that other groups are not as converted or are ignorant of biblical truth? Many, if not most, organizations disallow their members to associate with other groups and even unconverted family members. These are not obscure organizations with a few dozen members.

Refusing to associate with other believers because they are not members of your organization is putting yourself at risk of being deceived. Continuing in the company of those who cause divisions and offenses is putting yourself at risk of being deceived. Those in an organization that preach, teach, and do such things are, according to Jesus Christ and John, causing divisions and offenses and the Bible is clear—they are false christ and false prophets and, therefore, deceivers.

But what about those who left an organization? Are they not, as John said, antichrists?

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<sup>1</sup> John 17:17.

1 JOHN 2:18-19 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now **many antichrists have come**, by which we know that it is the last hour. 19 **They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.**

Perhaps; however, if they were 'disfellowshipped' or they left because of an offense, it is more likely that they are NOT antichrists. Instead, they left because they were the victim of one or more unreconciled offenses. On the other hand, it is impossible for organizations to disfellowship someone from the Body of Christ. God is Judge and only He can cut branches off the True Vine<sup>2</sup>. Disfellowshipping someone is a DECEPTIVE practice by those who claim to have authority that God never gave them. The Bible nowhere mentions it. In fact, Romans 16:17 simply says to avoid someone who is causing divisions and offenses; that is, until they repent. Then they are to be received back into the fold.

Another source of deception is ourselves:

1 JOHN 1:8 **If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves**, and the truth is not in us.

Oh, but no one who is converted would ever say that, right? What about avoiding fellowship with those in other organizations or believing they are 'less' converted? Is it not self-deception to judge who is and is not in Body of Christ? The only Judges are God and Jesus Christ. Who would dare to claim that authority on earth? Still, many do. What about saying others are less converted? Is that not self-deception to know what is in the heart and mind of others? What about continuing to listen to someone whose prophecies fail to come true? That is certainly a false prophet according to God in Deuteronomy 18:20-22. Or what about following a minister who claims to be the only source of biblical understanding? Making excuses for them so we can continue following them is self-deception. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard, "Well, I do not believe everything so-and-so says but I learn so much from him." It takes an enormous amount of pride for someone to claim they are best or only source of truth. Are these not sins by which we deceive ourselves?

One major self-deception is relying upon men for biblical truth. Yes, true elders have the authority and responsibility to teach God's Word, but ALL can be deceived—"the heart is deceitful of all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Failing to thoroughly prove (or disprove) what men say is self-deception. The good news is that this is something that you can easily test. If someone asks a question on a biblical topic, is your response directly from Scripture or do you say that so-and-so preacher said such-and-such? If it is the latter, then perhaps it is time to examine your relationship with God.

Deception needs much greater emphasis, especially these days. All believers need to ask God to reveal deceivers and our own self-deceptions alike. In the last few years, the politics in the USA has demonstrated the extent to which deception has replaced rational discussions as a way to influence people. Satan has upped his

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<sup>2</sup> John 15:4-6.

game to deceive the WHOLE world. That means he has also increased his deceptive influences upon the Body of Christ. And it is getting worse:

2 TIMOTHY 3:13-14 But **evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.** 14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,

In fact, the worst by far is yet to come because the man of sin has not come:

2 THESSALONIANS 2:3-4, 7-11 **Let no one deceive you** by any means; for *that day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and **the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,** 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. ... 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 **The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish,** because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,

Brethren, stay humble and contrite before God. Pray that He keep you from deception. Spend your time in fruitful prayer with God so that you might be able to stand against ALL the deception that is here and is yet to come:

EPHESIANS 6:11-13 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to **stand against the wiles of the devil.** 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, **that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.**

And always remember this promise:

PSALM 72:14 **He [the King; i.e. Jesus Christ] shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence; and precious shall their blood be in His sight.**

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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