

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Major deceptions from false prophets, false christs, and antichrists will arise in the End-Times that will turn many of the *ekklesia* from salvation. The threat from the world is real and concerning as discussed in Part 1. However, there is also a salvational peril from within the *ekklesia*—the Body of Christ:

COLOSSIANS 2:4, 8, 18-23 Now this I [*Paul*] say lest anyone should **deceive you** with **persuasive words [enticing words]**. ... 8 Beware lest anyone **cheat [seduce] you through philosophy [fallacious arguments with intent to deceive] and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world,** and not according to Christ. ... 18 Let no one **cheat [defraud] you** of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and **not holding fast to the Head,** from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is* from God. 20 Therefore, if **you died with Christ from the basic principles** of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do **you subject yourselves to regulations [principles laid down by an authority as indisputably true]**— 21 “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” 22 which all **concern things which perish [are corrupt]** with the using—**according to the commandments [authoritative warning or order] and doctrines [teachings] of men?** 23 These things indeed **have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion [counterfeit religion or false worship], false humility, and neglect [asceticism = self-inflicted physical and mental denial] of the body,** *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

How does the *ekklesia* withstand such powerful deceit from within itself? That is one responsibility given to shepherds and teachers by Jesus Christ:

EPHESIANS 4:11-14 And He [*Jesus Christ*] Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some **pastors and teachers,** 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, **for the edifying of the body of Christ,** 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that **we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine [teaching], by the trickery [fraud] of men, in the cunning craftiness [sophistry = false arguments intended to deceive] of deceitful plotting [fraudulent means],**

ACTS 20:28 “Therefore take heed to yourselves [*Ephesian elders*] and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has **made you overseers [watchers], to shepherd [feed] the [ekklesia] of God** which He purchased with His own blood.

A true shepherd of God watches and protects the *ekklesia* from fraud and deceit. How? By teaching God’s TRUTH:

EPHESIANS 4:15-16 but, **speaking the truth in love**, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of **the body for the edifying of itself in love**.

Truth EDIFIES the Body of Christ. What does it mean to edify? The Greek noun for *edify* means *building* or *structure*. It is a compound word formed from two Greek words—*family dwelling* and *large building*. Combined, they refer to a large building in which a FAMILY resides. Paul often uses the verb form to refer to the work of BUILDING the Family Home of God—the spiritual house of God:

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house, *this* [tabernacle], is destroyed, we have **a building from God**, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

EPHESIANS 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows **into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God** in the Spirit.

But how does the *ekklesia* avoid being deceived if the deception comes from the very pastors and teachers Jesus Christ setup to protect it? Notice:

2 CORINTHIANS 11:12-15 But what I [*Paul*] do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity **to be regarded just as we are [desiring to be apostles or elders] in the things of which they boast**. 13 For **such are false apostles [pretended preacher], deceitful workers [or teachers], transforming [disguising] themselves into apostles of Christ**. 14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15 Therefore *it is* no great thing if **his ministers also transform [disguise] themselves into ministers of righteousness**, whose end will be according to their works.

The worst deceit comes from pastors and teachers who use their positions to SEDUCE the minds of those in the *ekklesia*:

TITUS 1:10-11, 13-16 For there are **many insubordinate, both idle [vain] talkers and deceivers [mind seducers], especially those of the circumcision**, 11 whose **mouths must be stopped, who subvert [overturn] whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest¹ gain**. ... 13 ... Therefore **rebuke [prove wrong, admonish] them sharply**, that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not giving heed to **Jewish fables [myths] and commandments [authoritative commandments or injunctions] of men who turn from the truth**. 15 To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even

¹ G0150 *aischros* = shameful, disgraceful, base, venal (subject to bribery). **Used only here.**

their mind and conscience are defiled. 16 **They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him**, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

There are MANY teachers who deceive the elect of God. There are MANY who abundantly live off of the brethren who usually have far less. What does God think about shepherds who live luxuriously off of the flock? (God answers that in Ezekiel 34: 1-3, 7-10.) There are also MANY who use their positions with false authority to control the *ekklesia* with “commandments of men.” That Greek phrase means authoritative injunctions not of God. Pastors and teachers have forbidden brethren to associate with any outside of their organization, banned Bible studies without a minister (usually for women), prevented people from attending services if they are not a member of their organization, established their own biblical interpretations as salvational, condemned people in and out of the *ekklesia*, etc. There are also MANY who preach God every week but deny Him in their WORKS. How? Showing preferential treatment to certain brethren and not others, withholding help from the poor and needy, not visiting the sick, rejecting those outside of their group, disfellowshipping those who disagree with them, condemning Protestants (the gospel was meant for the WHOLE world), etc.

How does one protect against the deceit of pastors and teachers? The same way one prevails against all manner of deceit—with the Truth of God:

EPHESIANS 5:6-14 Let no one **deceive you with empty words**, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them. 8 For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as **children of light** 9 (for the fruit of **the Spirit** *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and **truth**), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather **expose [rebuke, prove wrong, admonish] them [with the Truth of God]**. 12 For it is shameful [*improper*] even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But **all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light**, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14 Therefore He says: “Awake, you who sleep [*spiritually*], arise from the dead [*spiritually*], and **Christ will give you light.**”

Truth is the light that exposes fraud and deceit. But Truth alone cannot always stand against deceit; sometimes it is too powerful, overwhelming our minds. This is especially true where there is pressure to follow along with the organization. This is one reason pastors and teachers make “commandments of men”—authoritative injunctions—to falsely claim that salvation is assured to those who belong to *their* organization. That is why Truth must be RECEIVED with **agape love**—to prevail against the most powerful deceit! Paul warned of being deceived without the very important component of agape love in 2 Thessalonians 2: 13: **“they did not receive the [agape] love of the truth, that they might be saved.”**

Salvation can be lost even if one knows the Truth but does not have agape love. Truth is the armor that encircles the waist (Eph. 6: 14) and agape love is the breastplate (1 Thess. 5: 8). Together, they protect the entire trunk of the body

against the fiery darts of fraud and deceit. A pure heart of agape love is the strength to stand in the Truth when it is attacked:

EPHESIANS 6:11-13 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able **to stand against the wiles of the devil [the great deceiver—Rev. 12:9].** 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.

When powerful deceptions come that threaten to confuse the Truth, the courage to stand firm comes from agape love in the heart. This is why the Holy Spirit is one “of **power**, of **love**, and of a **sound mind [of Truth].**” (2 Tim. 1:7)².

IMPORTANT: A pure HEART of agape love is the power of God by which the *ekklesia* stand in the Truth when it is attacked by powerful and subtle fraud and deceit.

Fraud and deceit will come from the world and from within the *ekklesia*. Having the Truth in agape love is the only protection against all deceit. Truth in agape love guards the salvation of our souls. Realizing that “**evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse**, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13) stresses the vital importance of Truth in agape love!

ROMANS 16:17-19 Now I [*Paul*] urge you, brethren, note **those who cause divisions [disagreements that lead to discord] and offenses [stumblingblocks]**, 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 [innocent or unsuspecting].** 19 For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and **simple concerning evil.**

While it may sound too simple³ to be of any real consequence, that is the beauty of the gospel message. Truth in agape love IS “simple concerning evil” but it is the power and wisdom of God that protects and prevails against all deceit!

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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² Also John 14:17.

³ The simplicity that is in Christ—2 Cor. 11:3.