

Deception

and how to avoid it.

Introduction

Deception can be very dangerous. The deception of Eve led to the most tragic circumstances for mankind.

The forces of darkness are very interested in deceiving mankind - for them it is fruitful and one of their most effective wiles.

Deception is rife in the world, we see it operating in individuals, and in groups and organisations, and in nations. It starts with us - each individual believer affects the body of Christ. Where deception creeps in the result is damage.

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Chapter 1

Definition of deception

Deception is the misrepresentation of the truth.

To be deceived is to believe something that is not true.

In the values of the world we live in today increasingly there is no absolute truth – only ideas and opinions.

When we turn to scripture we find a very different story:

In Psalm 138 verse 2 David declares, *'You have magnified Your word above all Your name.'* Believers, rightly, highly esteem the names of God, yet the Lord puts His word higher still.

Of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ the apostle Paul declares, when talking about the exceeding greatness of God's power when He raised Jesus from the dead, *'He seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.'* Ephesians 1:20-21

It is in His capacity as the 'logos' (the word) that the name of Jesus is above every other name that can be named.

'The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O Lord, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.' Psalm 12:6-7

The Lord God considers His word to be so important, so eternal, that it is to be considered above all His names and it is preserved forever.

Here is the first challenge

Do I accept that *'all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness.'* 2 Timothy 3:16-17. ?

The world says NO! The serpent says NO!

What will a born again believer say? What will you say?

Will I say YES and submit my life to the word of God for exactly what Paul told Timothy is its purpose – doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness?

From this point on we will take the position that YES is the only safe and true answer for the born again believer and examine what and why things go wrong – in individuals, in the church and other organisations and in nations.

We take the position that YES is the right answer because that is the position of heaven.

Chapter 2 The deception of the individual.

Three imperatives:

- 1) Deny pressure from one's own desires
- 2) Deny pressure from worldly thinking
- 3) Deny pressure from evil

- 1) Pressure from one's own desires.

Here we have our greatest danger – our desires can be dangerous! *'Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.'* (Just like Eve!) James 1:14

The place of safety is God's word laid down for us in the scripture. Does our desire agree with scripture or are we overruling scripture with our ideas and opinions? Or with the culture and traditions that surround us? Or are our wants and ambitions leading us into deception?

We are called to live in Spirit and truth. We are told the Spirit will lead us into all truth.

So what do we do when, what seems to be, the leading of the Spirit does not agree with the scripture?

Recognise it for what it is - it is deception! The serpent appears as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14) He can mimic the Spirit and tempt us with something that appeals to us – just like he did to Eve.

The serpent can awaken subconscious desires and present to us something that has the appearance of good but is actually disobedience to God and His word.

Our place of safety is to check everything we believe, everything we think the Lord is saying to us against scripture – specifically against the New Covenant. (Be aware that temptation is most effective when it touches our own desires, conscious or subconscious.)

Let's consider some possibilities –

Two believers are unhappy in their marriage - so they consider divorce. They may even believe the Spirit is leading them, they may even have sought and received advice from other believers or even church leaders. But what does the bible say – best to be reconciled! Furthermore it says do not divorce, rather choose to live separately. (1 Corinthians 7:10-15.)

Obedience may seem hard – but obedience allows God to move in the situation. Simply submitting to God's word and both praying, 'Holy Spirit fill me with love for my husband or my wife' can transform the situation and bring glory to God.

A believer thinks he has a 'case' against another believer and seeks to go to court for redress. He may have consulted the elders, and may feel the Spirit leading this way. But what does the bible say – It is better to suffer wrong than to take a fellow believer to court. (1 Corinthians 6) Obedience may seem hard – but again obedience allows God to move in the situation to bring glory to Himself.

We should always check what we believe the Spirit to be saying against the truth of the scripture – to avoid being deceived. Bear in mind our enemy loves to deceive and appears as an angel of light.

We should always check advice from other believers and church leaders against the truth of scripture - to avoid being deceived. See

how the men of Berea tested what they heard against the scripture.
(Acts 17:11)

Who are we to say, the scripture is wrong or the scripture does not fit or apply in my circumstances, or the world has moved on so the eternal word of God no longer applies?

2) Pressure from world thinking

No excuse

There is no excuse for wrong thinking – *‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown to them.’*
Romans 1:18-19

The world suppresses the truth – incurring God’s wrath which will invoke judgement.

‘For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and God head, so that they are without excuse.’
Romans 1: 20

No excuse – look at creation, look at your own human frame for example. Creation is amazingly complex. The human frame is amazingly complex. Only a vastly superior power could instigate it. Imagining that we, in defiance of the second scientific law of thermodynamics which states that things left to themselves degenerate rather than improve and develop, somehow evolved from some sort of primeval soup is futile folly.

'Because although they knew God. They did not glorify Him as God, nor were they thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.'
Romans 1:21-22

The world, that is the majority of people, deny the Lord God. Here we are told this is their choice – actually in their inner being they know of God, but choose denial.

World thinking prefers human ideas and opinions rather than truth.
World thinking prefers darkness to light. (John 3:19)

The believer has a choice – will he or she believe the scripture or prefer men's ideas?

Who are we to say, the scripture is wrong or the scripture does not apply in my circumstances, or the world has moved on so the eternal word of God no longer applies?

3) Pressure from evil

Our enemy would love to deceive us.

Right from the beginning this has been his plan.
Look at Eve in Genesis chapter three.

The word of God - you may eat of every tree in the garden except of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Satan, manifest as the serpent, deceives Eve.

Here is his challenge to Eve - 'Has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree in the garden?'

Here is Eve's understanding – We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and

evil in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor touch it, lest you die.'

Here comes the temptation - the serpent said, 'You will not surely die. For God knows in that day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

Here is the challenge - Eve knows what God has said, though she embellishes it somewhat, and now the serpent entices her to disobey.

It seems good and desirable to Eve – so she takes and eats in disobedience to God. This is the trouble with deception, and its power, it looks good and desirable.

Lesson for us - the serpent is still looking for those to devour. He can put things before us to get us to disobey.

Who are we to say, the scripture is wrong or the scripture does not apply in my circumstances, or the world has moved on so the eternal word of God no longer applies?

Chapter 3

Deception of groups and organisations

We are going to look at this in two ways, making a distinction between believers and unbelievers.

Worldly groups and organisations

There is no point in expecting the local council, the government, schools, universities, any group or organisation, that does not recognise Jesus and follow Him, to be holy and righteous. In every case they will be subject to peer pressure, worldly thinking and deception with no absolute truth to provide safety.

The best we can hope for is that within such groups and organisations there will be believers bringing some salt and light as they pray into various situations that arise. And be willing to publicly speak out when led to do so? A Christian legal support group, Christian Concern are a good example of this – whether they win or not, they know that every case they defend is a public declaration of salt and light.

In satanic or demonic groups the situation is worse because they are actively worshipping another 'god.' All sorts of cults, quasi churches, witchcraft groups and so on exist. Their purpose – to frustrate that which is good and Godly by infiltrating and spreading falsehood.

When the Lord shows us something specific and we are led to pray against it we can have some effect as we listen for and apply His strategy, even closing down some of these things. (Best tackled by a group of believers with common witness rather than by individuals.)

Believers and churches.

Now we are going to look at churches. In this context we mean churches which do recognise Jesus Christ as truly divine, truly man, and truly sent from the Father for salvation for all who believe and put their trust in Him.

(Our definition therefore excludes organisations such as 'The church of the latter day saints,' (Mormons) and other like groups which are really cults rather than churches. That these groups, cults, and organisations are deceived is abundantly clear.)

How does deception get into 'mainline' churches?

(Our definition of mainline includes all the well known groups Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Orthodox, Lutherans etc. What we call 'house churches' are also vulnerable to deception when they do the same things.)

The answer is very simple - whenever they do not hold to scripture for the purpose for which it has been given – for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness they fall into a degree of deception.

Some 'mainline' churches put tradition and their culture above the word of truth. Right from early days churches have accommodated pagan traditions and or pagan festival dates into their practices on the guise of being more acceptable to the people they are trying to reach. (The festival of Christmas being one such example)

It also seems to be the case that often 'culture' and 'tradition' are not set in stone but easily change to take on the surrounding 'culture' of the world – thus getting progressively worse. We see this clearly when the church adopts the world view of marriage, abortion and sexuality.

So instead of standing out, as an unsullied witness to the truth, the light of truth is dimmed or even extinguished.

(In some cases tradition and culture are fiercely held and defended - this too can be dangerous where the traditions and the culture are unbiblical.)

Some 'mainline' churches put human reason above scripture. This is saying, 'it seems to us that this line of thinking or doctrine is better than the scripture.' An example would be the appointment of women in authority over men in the church and another would be appointing people to roles such as bishop, vicar, rector, minister and so on without recognising the scriptural rule – equal elders in every place.

Result

The church lacks power because the Holy Spirit of truth is grieved and there is little manifestation of His presence. The church slips into irrelevance and its voice is suppressed or even ridiculed.

The nation then receives little or no witness of the truth. There is then much less restraint of evil and society slips into more and more unrighteousness.

Chapter 4

The deception of nations.

When a nation takes on and is governed by falsehood (that is anything not in alignment with scripture) all sorts of evil prevail.

Outright deception

Communism is a prime secular example. Evil and control abounded under the communist rule. The government became 'god.' No freedom to preach the gospel. Denial was an offence leading to internment.

Islam is an example of a religion which does not recognise Jesus as divine. Islamic nations have developed a culture which is directly opposed to Christianity. No freedom to preach the gospel. Extremists have flourished therein and spread their evil actions all around the globe in the name of Allah. Denial meant death.

Western nations

The gospel flourished in the western nations with many, many becoming true born again believers as there was, and to some degree still is, freedom to preach the gospel - though this is now under much pressure. As the main line churches put culture and human reason above the inspired and eternal word of God so their value as salt and light was and is greatly diminished.

Diminishing righteousness

The very sad result is diminishing righteousness in the land. The watchword has become 'if it feels good to you do it,' for there is no

absolute, only ideas and opinions. Your idea, your opinion is totally valid.

The whole purpose of scripture – inspired by God to be good for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness – has been discredited if not entirely lost to the nations.

Result

Nations slipping into greater and greater deception. Church leaders have a lot to answer for as they utterly fail to speak up for the righteousness of the true gospel.

Chapter 5

Our enemy is at work – deception for men and women.

Be on guard against deception for the enemy of your soul will want to deceive you. Deception will render you inwardly uneasy, and can increase sicknesses, but you will continue to believe your deception and defend it until eventually the light comes on. Submission to the eternal truth of scripture is the safe place.

'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith.' 1 Peter 5:8-9

Follow the instruction of scripture – Paul, writing to the Ephesians laid down a path way. Walk in unity, walk in wisdom, walk in love, walk in light. He gave some more practical advice -

Men

Beware the pretty face, our enemy would like to destroy your marriage or lead you, if single, into an unsuitable marriage. Watch out – your desire, spoken or unspoken, may be for a 'better' spouse. Watch out - you may start to think that God surely intends a better spouse for you. You may even be 'led' to scripture which seems to agree.

Don't be fooled, it is deception – recognise the fundamental truth. No divorce for Christians – thus no remarriage.

'A husband is not to divorce his wife.' 1 Corinthians 7:11

The same principle applies to all areas of life. If in your job you are required to do things which are clearly wrong - such as bribery for example – get a new job. Seek the Lord, pray and look for a new position. (Or if the Lord leads you to stay and challenge either directly or in prayer then be obedient to His calling and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.)

Women, the church and then marriage

Beware the urge to be in control. Your husband may have weaknesses and in your eyes become unsuitable. But you are not to seek to take up control over him.

To any degree that you seek to control your husband it is a result of the fall of mankind in Genesis, chapter 3. It is sin and deception.

‘To the woman He said, ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’ Genesis 3:16

Here we need to understand that ‘desire’ is not sexual or physical desire, though that would be normal in a marriage. It is desire to control. This is demonstrated in the use of the same word for ‘desire’ in the next chapter.

The Lord speaking to Cain after his offering was rejected (it had no blood in it.) *‘If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you but you should rule over it.’ 4:7*

Sin desired to control Cain.

The underlying reason is to do with the position of Jesus and His church. The man / woman relationship pictures the Jesus / church relationship as explained in Ephesians 5:22-33. Here Paul explains that the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be subject to their own husbands in everything.

In the passage Paul explains he is using men / women relationships in marriage to illustrate the Jesus / church relationship.

The church is never to control Jesus, rather the church, as His body, is to do everything the Head desires and instructs. Likewise in human relationships the man is to rule over the woman as we have read in Genesis 3 and Ephesians 5.

There is no block to women having authority over men in world – as the world does not follow scripture, but in the church and in marriage the Jesus / Church relationship is to demonstrated and pictured.

This is contradictory to today's culture in the western world and therefore raises some difficulties. But we have to decide are we going to act in accordance with the world's culture and human 'reason,' or are we going to align our actions with the clear teaching of scripture which is good for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.'

More on marriage

Now we must add – men are not to dominate over women - husbands are not to be dominating and unreasonable. Rather we are to be like Jesus who laid down His life for His bride, the true born again church.

This balance is hard to achieve, indeed I would suggest that it is impossible to achieve just by our own strength. This is why many marriages come under stress – and of course, the enemy would sow seeds of discontent to both partners.

The remedy, and a vital ingredient in every marriage, particularly Christian marriage is first determine – the truth, the word God is

right and will be applied – then pray ‘Lord increase (or give me) more and more love for my spouse.’ Keep praying and keep praying. Watch and see how the Lord brings joy and peace and happiness even in situations where it seemed that the marriage was dead. Where both partners submit to the word of God and pray - then see Him bring life out of what seemed to be dead or dying.

Chapter 6

How to avoid deception

Take up your cross

The very simple answer is submit everything to the truth of the scripture – bearing in mind that the leading of the Holy Spirit will never contradict it.

This is what is meant by ‘take up your cross.’ *‘And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.’* Luke 14:27

‘For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with (literally, rendered inoperative), that we should no longer be slaves to sin.’ Romans 6:5-6

Taking up the cross is overcoming the lusts of the flesh – for the flesh lusts against the Spirit. (Galatians 5:17) So it is a matter of daily application.

Applying the scripture

The bible contains everything essential to our understanding. *‘His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and Godliness.’* 2 Peter 1:3 part.

We have already seen that *‘all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for*

instruction in righteousness.' In Paul's second letter to Timothy. (3:16)

Now we have to apply Paul's other instruction to Timothy – *'be diligent to present your self approved to God a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.'* (2:15)

Paul has used the *'graphe'* for scripture and *'logos'* for word in the two passages. We need to understand the difference.

The meaning of *graphe*, translated as scriptures or writings, is pretty clear and needs no explanation.

This is where we need to understand what is meant by *'logos.'* For it encompasses more than the scripture alone. It is a personal name of Jesus Christ – as seen in John chapter 1 where Jesus is described as the word (*logos*). In Colossians 2:9 we are told that in Jesus all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form. *'Logos'* then is the *'full works,'* as it were.

Jesus commanded that man does not live by bread alone but by every word (*rhema*) that proceeds (present tense) from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4) So here we have another element – God speaking. As the *logos* is all encompassing the spoken word or *rhema* is, like the scripture, part of the *logos*.

Two imperatives

- 1) *'My sheep hear My voice.'* John 10:27 The *'rhema'* word is like bread to us. We have already stressed and stressed that which the Holy Spirit brings to us, from Jesus, will never contradict the scripture. (John 16:13-15)
- 2) All scripture is given by inspiration of God

Rightly dividing the scripture.

Timothy was urged to rightly divide the scripture – literally that means to cut it up straight.

We can see times when God's instructions in the scripture developed and moved on through His plan:

- a) At first there was only the spoken word as God spoke to Adam. This lasted until God's plan moved on to the establishment of a people for Himself – Israel.
- b) Most of what we call the Old Testament deals with God's relationship with Israel, with the Law He gave them, their history mostly of failure and with prophecy about their future. The law was given to Israel to demonstrate the need for the Messiah, and to be a tutor, pointing them to the Messiah to come.
- c) Then the Messiah came and was rejected by Israel. God's plan moved on to the bride for Jesus. A mystery not revealed in the Old Testament - but a wonderful mystery summed with the words, '*Christ in you the hope of glory.*' Colossians 1:27

To fully understand this mystery we have to study particularly the writing of Paul – for it was to him that it was revealed. (This is, of course in addition to studying the gospels and the letters and books of the New Testament.)

The letter to the Romans, the letter to the Ephesians and the letters to the Thessalonians contain, for the most part, the doctrine that applies to the bride. Paul's other letters to churches focus more on practical and spiritual correction.

In the New Testament the focus is the heart – not now circumcision of the flesh, but circumcision of the heart.

In the New Testament the focus is light and love.

In the New Testament the focus is not our good works but obedience in doing the works God has prepared for us and so bear fruit.

In the New Testament the focus is demonstrating to the principalities and powers the manifold wisdom of God.

In the New Testament the focus is walking in the Spirit not in our own ideas – the flesh.

Chapter 7

Deception and grace

Deception is not all or nothing, it comes in degrees - some deception is very mild, some very severe and 'all stations' in between.

God's grace is super abundant - we find that confirmed in Romans 5:17. *'For if by one man's offence death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One Jesus Christ.'*

So what is the effect of deception?

Jesus said, *'the truth will set you free.'* The statement was conditional, - *'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed, And you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free.'* John 8:31-32.

So now we can ascertain that our freedom is related to knowing the truth. (And applying it!) The more one understands of the truth, by abiding in the word, the more freedom we experience.

Deception will hold us back from the full freedom in Christ that truth brings. Mild deception will have much less effect than severe deception - but both are harmful, it is just a question of degree.

Grace is always available but the Holy Spirit who brings God's grace to us, is limited to truth - He cannot bring or speak or do anything that is not true to His nature - He is the Spirit of Truth.

So at the present time we look to be changed from one degree of glory to another by the Spirit bringing us step by step into greater truth and greater freedom. His presence can then manifest in us, in life now, on earth, more and more.

(The Holy Spirit dwells in our human spirit and will never leave - 1 John 3:9 So we are referring to greater and greater effect of the Holy Spirit in soul and body.)

Deception at work.

One way of assessing whether or not deception is present is to look for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. An individual who experiences very little fruitfulness of his or her actions should ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any deception.

Deception at work in the church.

We can observe some, who are in some level of deception, still functioning, to a degree, in things of the Spirit - that is God's grace at work. Nowhere do we find perfection amongst mankind - though that is our goal and our eventual destination when Christ returns.

No manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the meetings - then raise the question - are we fully in the truth as revealed in the scriptures?

Bear in mind that God's grace is super abundant.

When William Haslam, an unconverted Anglican minister was preaching on one occasion, in mid flow the Holy Spirit opened his eyes to see the truth. Members of the congregation sensed his immediate conversion and cried out the vicar's got saved.

Pray – when one observes deception in one’s fellows, then pray for them to come into all truth. Only challenge them when, and if, the Lord tells you to do so – otherwise pray for them to be blessed with revelation of the truth and watch. We are all children of the Lord.

Pray – for church leadership to fully understand and fully operate in the truth. Bear in mind God’s grace – His grace will still work to some degree in church even when the church is not ‘perfect’ in scriptural truth. Indeed, revival tends to break out where church and society is well off beam like in the Hebridean revival for example.

The comfortable place for Holy Spirit

Here is a target. The Holy Spirit, being the Spirit of truth, is most comfortable where truth abounds. That much should be obvious.

(Scripture urges us not to quench and not to grieve the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:19 and Ephesians 4:30)

Individuals - let us seek to be led into more and more truth. We can make that our prayer, ‘Holy Spirit lead me into more and more truth.’ Then the Holy Spirit will become more and more comfortable.

Groups/ churches – likewise the church or group can seek the Holy Spirit for more and more truth. The church can ‘organise’ itself in accordance with scripture. The more the church seeks to be true to scripture the more comfortable the Holy Spirit will be and greater will be the manifestation of His presence when we gather together.

Increase and decrease

Christianity is about the increase of the presence of Jesus through His Spirit in individuals, in churches in nations. Christianity is about the decrease of man's own ways – in us individually and in groups and in nations.

'Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.'

Colossians 2:8

John the Baptist understood. John knew that Jesus was full of grace and truth. John declared, *'He must increase, but I must decrease.'* John 3:30

Paul understood. Though he was given outstanding revelations of heaven and received the understanding of the mystery – *'Christ in you the hope of glory,'* nevertheless he saw himself as the least.

'To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.' Ephesians 3:8

More of You Lord. Many of us want more and more of Jesus our Lord. We have His presence through the indwelling Holy Spirit, yet we want more manifestation of His presence in life, that is actually in body and soul. He must increase; deception must decrease.

How to avoid deception

Become like John and like Paul – do not think too highly of yourself. Rather pray continually for more and more understanding of the truth and receive more and more freedom in Christ in life.

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