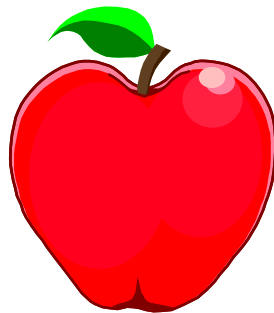


DECEPTION

The Deadly Virus



Paul Fahy

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DECEPTION:

The Deadly Virus

We are given clear warnings in the New Testament to watch out and pray, especially at the end of the age, since deception and even strong delusion will be rampant. This paper is written: ***to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs (or devices)***, (2 Cor 2:11). The sad fact is that many contemporary Christians are completely unaware of Satan's methods. Paul's ministry was to open eyes (Acts 26:17-18) since a key tactic of the enemy is concealment. Six times he says: *'I would not have you ignorant'*, (Rm 1:13, 11:25; 1 Cor 10:1, 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8; 1 Thess 4:13). At other times he prays that we may *know*, that the eyes of our hearts should be *enlightened* (e.g. Eph 1:17-18). We are commanded to watch out, if it was necessary then, how much more now.

Sincerity and a godly character is no defence either. We cannot trust our self life or that of our leaders. If it was, we would not need to watch, to test and judge all things; including ourselves and our leaders. We must not look to men but God. Good Christian leaders have often fell victim to deception; both history and scripture shows this. Yes, even your beloved, godly, compassionate, Biblical leader could be deceived if he does not watch, pray and test ***all*** things. Faith in your church, your denomination, your elders, your knowledge, your experience, your sincerity, your gifts, will all fail the test. Only the truth sets free. We must test everything purporting to be of God by his word, in his Spirit, and nothing else.

In recent days we have seen the rise of doctrines and practices

which are historically original. We have witnessed flagrant rejection of scripture by esteemed leaders. People have even suffered abuse of all sorts: mental, authoritarian, physical, emotional, from the hands of those they trusted. Yet this is not just occurring in liberal settings or zany cults; it is happening right now in Evangelical churches and organisations. It almost seems that those that zealously want to serve God are more susceptible to deceit than those that merely plod on slowly but faithfully. What is going on?

The root cause of all these errors is deception. It is the origin of movements, theories, doctrines and practices that veer away from the truth resulting in a danger that can even be fatal. Yet deception has not been extensively studied in a popular format. Often it is a subject missed in technical and theological resources. Many books have pointed out the deceitful qualities of aberrant practices such as: New Age thinking, cults, false doctrine and abusive church structures; but there are few which are examinations of what deception is in a Biblical context which then draw lessons for today.

This article is intended to try to fill the gap. It's only a start, and others can take it further. I want to explore the Biblical words and statements used to get a full picture of this deadly disease so that we can learn to be aware of the danger.

Words used in the New Testament

There are many words, and word groups, that are used to describe aspects of deception. In English they revolve around words like: *deceit, deceiver, snare, to lead astray, wandering, delusion, seduction* and so on. In Greek the key nouns are: *Apate, dolos, plane, pagis*. There are at least 15 words used, mostly related to these. In order to pursue a thorough study, we must look briefly at these to draw conclusions as to meanings. (Numbers in brackets refer to Strong's code.)

Greek root : **Plan**

- Plane** - (4106), n. literally, a wandering, i.e. those that are led astray. A mental straying, error, wandering from the truth, delusion, deception to which one is subject (1 Thess 2:3, Eph 4:14).
[Note: the word *planet*, lit. a wanderer, derives from this word.]
- Planos** - (4108), Adj. wandering, leading astray, seducing, unstable, (1 Tim 4:1). When used as a noun it denotes an impostor, deceiver, corrupter (2 Jn 7).
- Planao** - (4105), vb. In the passive: to go astray, to wander, to be misled, (Matt 18:12). In the active form: to deceive by confusing or leading into error, mislead, lead astray (Jn 7:12). Used as a title of the Devil in Rev 12:9.
- Often used of deceiving oneself e.g. 1 Cor 6:9,15:33;
Gal 6:7.

Greek cognates of **Apate**

- Apate** - (539), n. deceit, deceitfulness, false impression. Also deceitful influences seducing to sin, lusts excited by deceit, pleasure that involves one in sin, trickery. (Deceit of riches: Matt 13:22; of sin: Heb 3:13.)
- Apatao** - (538), vb. beguile, deceive, to cheat, used of empty words reducing the true character of sin (Eph 5:6), to mislead, lead astray.
- Exapateo** - (1818), vb. *apateo + ek (ex)* intensive, to beguile thoroughly, deceive wholly (1 Tim 2:14; Rm 7:11).
- Phrenapateo** - (5422), vb. Literally: to deceive in one's mind (*phren* = mind), self-conceit (Gal 6:3).
- Phrenapates** - (5423), n. a mind deceiver (Titus 1:10).

Greek cognates of **Dolos**

- Dolos** - (1388), n. bait, snare, craft, deceit, guile, wicked cunning, treachery, lure (Mk 7:22; Rm 1:29).
- Dolios** - (1386), Adj. deceitful, treacherous.
- Dolioo** - (1389), vb. to lure with a bait, ensnare, deceive (Rm

3:13).

Doloo - (1389), vb. shorter form of *Dolioo*, to ensnare, corrupt, especially by mingling truth with false doctrine, tarnish, adulterate, 2 Cor 4:2.

Additional Greek words:

Paralogizomai - (3884), vb. literally to reason amiss (*para* = amiss, from, *logizomai* = to reason). To beguile, to cheat/deceive by false reasoning, to reckon wrong, miscount, draw false conclusions, to delude, Col 2:4; Jam 1:22.

Pagis - (3803), n. a trap, a snare (as fastened by a knot), allurements to evil, a trick or stratagem (1 Tim 3:7; 2 Tim 2:26), seduction to evil (1 Tim 6:9). Sudden judgment of God (Luke 21:34).

Brochos - (1029), n. a noose (1 Cor 7:35).

Deleazo - (1185), vb. beguile, entice (originally: to catch with a bait), (Jam 1:14; 2 Pt 2:14).

kapeleuo - (2585). corrupt. Used by Paul in 2 Cor 2:17 of those who corrupt the word of God. The root word *kapelos* refers to a huckster (originally of wine, tempted to dilute his product with water). It is a term of contempt, probably similar to our modern *con-man*, or *scam-artist*. *Kapeleuo* is shameful traffic, wicked gain. It includes and is more vile than *doloo* in that it refers to the motive of profit making as well as falsifying. It was used of false teachers e.g. Lucian: 'The philosophers sell their learning just as the hucksters (*kapeloi*)- indeed in many cases after adulterating it and tampering (*dolosantes*) with it and using false measures.'¹ It is a prostitution of learning utilising deceit.

Greek words grouped under English meanings:

Deceit: *apate, apateo, exapateo, phrenapateo, dolos, dolios, dolioo, planao, paralogizomai.*

¹ Hermotius 59, quoted from Trench, p244

Deceiver: *planos, phrenapates.*
Delusion: *plane.*
Beguile: *deleazo, paralogizomai, apateo.*
Snare: *pagis, brochos.*
Corrupt: *kapeleuo.*

Old Testament related words:

2048 (cheat), 4820 (deceit, treachery), 4860 (deceit), 5230 (defraud, beguile), 5377 (delude), 6231 (defraud by deceit), 6601 (allure), 7411 (delude, betray), 7423 (deceit, false), 7423, (go astray), 7683 (to stray), 7686 (to stray, deceive), 7952 (mislead), 8267 (deceit, falsehood), 8496 (deceit, fraud, oppression), 8582 (deceive, seduce), 8591 (deceive, cheat), 8649 (deceit, fraud).

Summary of New Testament Meanings of *deception*

- Seducing to sin
- Lusts excited by deceit
- Pleasure that involves one in sin
- False impressions
- To be snared, beguiled, lured, trapped with a bait
- The use of cunning, treachery
- To be misled, led astray, deceived from the right way
- Deception of the mind
- To be corrupted, especially by mingling truth with lies
- To falsify, adulterate
- Wandering from the truth
- To be deluded
- To be deceived by false reasoning
- To cheat, to profit from deceiving people
- To reckon wrong, draw false conclusions

The main sense in the New Testament is the enticing to sin (error) by wrong thinking (2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:14; Rm 7:11), accepting what is false as if it were true. This puts a person under Satan's control and leads the person astray. The deception always leads to deeper things: worse sin, alienation from the truth and change

in the person's lifestyle.

Semantic Background

In the Old and New Testaments we see several warnings to the Lord's people using a particular metaphor. They are described as sheep which must follow their shepherd (God) to be safe. If they do not, they will wander away, get lost and perish (cf. Num 27:17; 1 Kg 22:17; Ps 119:176; Isa 53:6; Ezek 34; Zech 13:7; Matt 10:6, 12:11, 14:19, 18:12, 26:31; Jn 10).

Planao and its cognates are part of the framework of this picture. Nearly all the places where these words are used may be interpreted in terms of this background, even when it is not expressly mentioned. ²

The objective of deception is to lure the sheep away from the protection of the shepherd so that they can be destroyed. This is more subtle and dangerous than a headlong attack on the sheep and the shepherd and history shows that it is far more successful. The sheep end up destroying themselves.

Conclusions so far

We have seen that this subject occupies a great deal of semantic thought in the Bible. This is not surprising since man's whole condition was brought about by deception and his natural position is one of utter delusion.

Many words are required to expose the fine nuances of meaning. Such a wealth of material drives us to the realisation that this is a very important subject to God, and one which he wishes us to be clear on.

How we deal with deception lies at the root of our walk with God. We will definitely have to confront it. To fail to apply wisdom in this area will surely mean that we are exposed to danger and could

² Dict. of NT Theology, Vol 2, p459-460

end up not following the shepherd and losing our way completely.

EXPOSITION

Detailed exegesis will not be attempted here, the principles to be drawn from these texts will follow in the course of the paper.

Passages in the Gospels

Matt 24:4,5,11,24; Mk 13:5-6; Lk 21:8

Jesus warns us to take heed, to beware, of people who will try to lead us astray, either deliberately or unwittingly. We are expressly told not to go after them. The close of the age will entail a great deal of deception including the extreme of people claiming to be Christ himself (v5). Jesus says that these men will be successful in leading *many* astray. This is especially tragic as these people are clearly intending to be spiritual or they wouldn't bother following an imitation of Christ.

It is also a time of false prophets (v11). These also fool many people, due to their ability to perform signs and wonders (v24). There are differences of opinion about the phrase: *if possible, even the elect*. Some feel that it means the elect are safe, others that the elect can also be taken in. Scripture elsewhere shows that Christians can be deceived and history gives many examples of even very serious cases. (See also: 2 Thess 2 notes)

Mk 7:22

The practice of deceit arises from within the heart just like other sins. It is critical that we guard our heart (Prov 4:23) and take an firm interest in our internal security. The entrance point for being deceived by wrong thinking is the mind. We must take every thought captive and guard our minds (2 Cor 10:5). How much attention is paid to keeping the inner man sound these days?

Passages in Acts

Acts 5:3-11

There is no reason to suspect that Ananias and Sapphira were not genuine Christians, after all they had sold land to give to the church. Yet they were deluded to the point of lying and indulging in a cover up. Hypocrisy for them was fatal.

Acts 13:10

Elymas (Bar-Jesus) was a Jewish false prophet and magician. He is clearly not a believer, who sought to oppose the Gospel in Cyprus. He is said to be full of deceit.

Passages in Paul's letters

Rm 1:29,3:13

Deceit is part and parcel of the nature of natural man in his depravity.

Rm 16:18

Paul warns of deceit within the church which comes by flattering and pleasant words. The simple-minded are deluded. We must not ignore the importance of an intelligent approach to the scriptures.

1 Cor 3:18, 15:33; Gal 6:3, 7

Self-deceit is possible and must be guarded against. Pride is the root of this.

1 Cor 6:9

It is a deception to imagine that unrighteous people will inherit the kingdom.

2 Cor 4:2

Paul refused to meddle deceitfully with God's word but simply expounded the scriptures plainly.

2 Cor 11:3, 13-15; 1 Tim 2:14

Satan deceived Eve by cunning deceit and can attack us in similar ways. It is unpopular and politically incorrect, but no less true, that women think differently to men. Their increased sensitivity and

intuitive qualities make them able to empathise with children much better for instance. It also makes them more religious and it is common to find that they are the most ardent supporters in church services. They often show an increased sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. The downside of this, however, is that they are more susceptible to deception, being more open and functioning more emotionally than most men. This means that leaders should not be negligent in caring for and supporting women in the body.

With the attack of deception, the first thing to fall is pure devotion to Christ. The leaders whom Satan uses for this are called false apostles, deceitful workmen and servants of righteousness. The danger is in the pretence to a genuine godly life. This should not surprise us as the Devil disguises himself as an angel of light. He has more opportunity to lead people astray by pretending to be of God than by direct attack as an enemy.

Eph 4:14

It is essential that we are equipped and built up in our faith to avoid deception. The body of Christ is the place where this building up takes place. We are subject to: *the cunning, craftiness and deceitful wiles* of men and must understand truth so that we can avoid being blown about by every new teaching that becomes popular.

Eph 4:22

Our old nature is still around and is full of deceitful lusts. It must be continually put off and we must be renewed in the spirit of our minds, putting on the new nature.

2 Thess 2:10

Prior to the coming of the Lord there will be a great rebellion which includes the mysterious *man of lawlessness*. This person is put forward by Satan with the evidential support of signs and wonders in great power; but he is founded upon wicked deception. Those that believe in this are then completely deluded and are condemned. If the Matt 24 passage refers to this, then the elect are **not** deceived by this man of sin. The situation is serious but believers see through it because these rebellious people,

according to Paul, refuse to believe the truth, are not saved and then perish, so they cannot be believers. Christians can be deceived, but it appears that they are given grace to be spared this special deception

1 Tim 3:7

It is possible for elders to fall into the snare of the Devil.

1 Tim 4:1-5, 2 Tim 3:13

There will be a submission to deceitful spirits via false teaching at the end which affects the elect. Proposers of this false teaching have a seared conscience and are liars. Some aspects of end times false teaching are: encouraging abstinence from certain foods and the forbidding of marriage. Hypocritical deceit goes from bad to worse. There is no easy turning around once fooled.

1 Tim 6:9

The desire to be rich is an evidence of deception. The result is destruction.

2 Tim 2:26

Deceit is a trap, a snare of the Devil.

Titus 1:10

There are many deceivers abroad, including in the church (e.g. the circumcision party mentioned here which was a group of legalist, Jewish teachers who tried to bring Jewish practices to bear on Christians).

Passages in the general letters

Heb 3:13

The danger of deception is reduced by the encouragement of fellowship, especially that which exhorts and confronts.

Jm 1:14

The origin of deceit is a wrong desire in the heart.

Passages in John's letters and Revelation

1 Jn 3:7

Deception is possible for believers

Rev 12:9

Satan is the deceiver of the whole world

Rev 13:14

The second beast deceives the whole world utilising signs and wonders. He is empowered by Satan.

Rev 18:23

Babylon (the religious world system) deceives by sorcery.

Rev 19:20

The false prophet deceives by using signs and wonders.

Rev 20:3

God stops Satan from deceiving to his fullest potential during the millennial period. [This is either the Gospel age (millennial viewpoint), or a future golden age before the return of Jesus (postmillennial viewpoint) or an age under the reign of Jesus but prior to the end (pre-millennial viewpoint).]

Rev 20:8,10

After the millennium period, there is a short time of renewed deception from Satan in full force to deceive the nations.

Can Christians be Deceived?

THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE SAYS YES

Examples

- **David** (1 Chron 21:1)

Note that this is late in David's experience. He was a mature man, experienced king and conqueror, and a wise believer

and Psalm writer. None of this prevented his deception which resulted in the death of 70,000 men.

- **Peter**

Poor Peter suffered the onslaught of the enemy more than once. First he tried to prevent Jesus from going to Jerusalem; he actually grabbed Jesus and rebuked him (Matt 16:22-23)! This was the result of Satanic deception. Later, not having learned his lesson, he denied his Lord with a curse on himself (Matt 26:74). It seems that he would have fallen still further had not Jesus intervened for him (Lk 22:31). His closeness to Jesus did not prevent his deception.

References

- Jm 1:22 We deceive ourselves if we fail to apply the word
- Jm 1:26 We deceive ourselves if we fail to bridle our tongue
- 1 Jn 1:8 We deceive ourselves if we fail to acknowledge sin
- Gal 6:3 We deceive ourselves if we are proud (also 1 Cor 3:18)
- Gal 6:7 We deceive ourselves if we fail to realise there is a result to sinful behaviour (also 1 Cor 6:9)
- 1 Cor 15:33 We deceive ourselves if we fail to see that we are affected by bad company
- 1 Jn 3:6-10 We deceive ourselves if we allow unrighteousness to rule
- 2 Tim 2:26 We can be captured, ensnared and deceived (also 2 Thess 2:3); this includes leaders (1 Tim 3:7)
- Eph 5:6 We are warned not to let others deceive us with empty words (also Col: 2:4,8)
- 1 Tim 4:1 In later times some will definitely depart from the faith as a result of following the deceit arising from demonic teaching
- 1 Jn 3:7 We must not let anyone deceive us, we can be deceived

How come?

Regeneration does not prevent the possibility of deceit. In regeneration our heart is made new. Our old heart was deceived (Jer 17:9; Isa 44:20) but when we came to Christ we were given a new one (Ezek 36:26-27). However, this new and clean heart does not prevent us from sinning, as we all know. It can become contaminated because it is from the heart that life flows (Prov 4:23) and sin arises (Matt 12:34). Similarly, we can be susceptible to deception.

We are responsible for what we admit into our lives via our minds. As long as we allow the truth of God to occupy our mind we will be secure. If we dwell on truth, we shall remain free. But the mind can be darkened by Satan (2 Cor 4:4) as well as renewed by God (Eph 4:23).

The Origin and Manner of deception

SATAN

The origin of all deception is the Devil. He is the father of lies (Jn 8:44-47) and deception is simply a lie, even if it involves some truth. The very first act of deceit was perpetrated by Satan in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3) and deception has been his key weapon against man ever since.

At the end of the age Satan is still seen to be working pre-eminently by deceit. In Rev 13 the second beast 'deceives those who dwell on the earth' (v14). This character is manipulated by Satan who himself is said to deceive the whole world (Rev 12:9) and the nations (Rev 20:3ff) .

God sometimes allows his people to be deceived to further his purposes; he allows 'some of those who are wise shall fall, to refine and cleanse them', Dan 11:35. (We will look at this further shortly. Note the change in Jim Bakker of PTL ministries since his downfall and imprisonment.)

HOW SATAN WORKS

1. Through leaders

2 Cor 11:13-15; Matt 24:4, 5, 11, 24

Satan uses people of influence so that others can be readily infiltrated. Authoritarian leaders are especially useful to him since people are not just influenced by them but cajoled into obedience. Those in positions of teaching others are especially targeted by the enemy since the essence of deception is wrong teaching (1 Tim 4:1, *doctrines of demons*, i.e. spirits that teach error). In causing a leader to sin he may destroy one man. In capturing a leader with deception, he may cause thousands to sin and miss the way completely.

These texts show that the sort of people used are:

- *ministers of righteousness*
- *false Christs*
- *false prophets*
- *false apostles*
- *deceitful workmen*

These are not obvious sinners or scandalous characters, but are people professing to be godly. They are accepted by many as from God. They may be wolves but they look like sheep. We should distinguish between false teachers and deceived teachers. The false teacher, prophet etc. is out to destroy. He is evil. He is the wolf in the sheepfold. However, many genuine, sincere, godly teachers may be thoroughly deceived as to the true Gospel message and may be teaching others. They are obviously unaware that they are deluded; as the proverb writer says: *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death*, (Prov 14:12 repeated in 16:25).

The judge of teaching is the Bible, not character. A teacher may be a good man but hopelessly misled in doctrine. It is dangerous

to accept teaching simply because the teacher is a godly person. Satan will work harder to get a good man to accept a small deception, than to get a bad man to accept a large one.

2. Through acts of power

2 Thess 2:9-10, Matt 24:4,24

Satan and his underlings are shown here to use: *power, signs and lying wonders*. This should not surprise us since Satan himself often disguises himself as an angel of light.

It is sheer folly to accept every supernatural occurrence as divine; yet many Christians seem to be doing exactly that in these days. If there is a sign of power in a service it is automatically a cause of joy and excitement, yet the words of Jesus indicate that we should beware at this point. John would tell us to test this work.

3. Lies mixed with truth

The word used to describe this is *hypocrisy or pretence*. In 1 Tim 4:1-3 Paul explains that some will depart from the faith as a result of believing the doctrinal lies of demons given through men speaking hypocritically, A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be one thing but is in fact another. Many doctrines are arising in these days which pretend to be from God but are in fact weird and heretical. Yet many teaching these things are esteemed Christian teachers with huge followings.

Examples of such teachings are:

- Satan conquered Jesus on the cross³
- It is wrong to pray using the words - 'if it be thy will'⁴
- Man was created on terms of equality with God⁵
- God doesn't have the right to act on the earth⁶

³ Kenneth Copeland : Quotes for these footnotes are from Christianity in Crisis, Hank Hanegraaff, Harvest House, Eugene, Oregon 1993, p11

⁴ Benny Hinn, *ibid*

⁵ Kenneth E Hagin, *ibid*

- The Godhead consists of nine people⁷
- ‘When we stand here.. you’re looking at God’⁸

Many statements like these and others arise from flashes of ‘revelation’ or times when a spirit guide spoke during a prolonged time ‘in the spirit’. There has obviously been no care or concern to check them against the Bible using normal rules of exegesis. If the teacher really believes such arrant nonsense (and there is worse), then he is seriously deceived. Yet so are the multitudes that follow them and pour money into their global ministries. Great Britain now has been placed more directly under the influence of men like this as the first religious cable channel available in the UK has on its schedules: Kenneth Copeland, Morris Cerullo and Benny Hinn.

The great danger, especially for young Christians, is that these wild teachings are intermingled with truth. The lethal combination of flashes of revelation and human reasoning at the expense of scripture is plain for all to see.

4. Outright lies

In the garden of Eden (Gen 3) innocence and unspoiled righteousness was no safeguard against the wiles of Satan. The only hope for Adam and Eve was total obedience to the word of God. So this was where the attack of the enemy started: ‘Did God really say ...’(v1), finalising in the outright lie: ‘You will not die’ (v4). 1 Tim 2:13-14 is a commentary on this and explains that Eve was deceived and became a transgressor. Adam’s sin was worse by deliberately rebelling, but he was not deceived.

Rm 1:25: In the Greek it says that men believed *the* lie; the same lie Satan has been deceiving men with since creation, i.e. that they can be as God without God. There is no truth in this, it is an outright lie, but men are willing to believe because it flatters their pride. At the end of the day, a proud heart is at the root of much

⁶ Kenneth Copeland, *ibid* p142

⁷ Benny Hinn, *ibid* p123-4

⁸ Morris Cerullo, *ibid* p109

deception. It was the original cause of Satan's downfall. He himself was deluded into thinking he could succeed in a rebellion against God. Now he panders to men's pride in order to deceive them.

A modern example of the close connection of a blatant lie and deception is the matter of homosexuality, also referred to in this passage of Romans. The Bible clearly condemns this as perverse. In Rm 1:27 it is called an *error*. The word here is *plane*, sometimes used for sin in the sense of error as well as delusion. It is used here to show that the sin of homosexuality is a deception. Supporters of the Gay movement, which now includes many Christians, are adamant that being Gay is normal and simply the result of wrong chromosomes in the wrong body. This is a lie in total contradiction to the Bible. To believe this is to be deceived, hence the use of *plane*. This also shows the close connection between deception and sin.

5. Imitation

This is especially effective. The counterfeit bank note is dangerous because it looks so much like the real thing. Modern forgeries need to be scanned under ultra violet light or marked with a special pen to be sure of genuineness. The unaided human eye is insufficient to notice the difference.

The same is true of spiritual things. We cannot judge simply by looking at the action of a deceiver. The searchlight of God and the comparison with his word is the only sure guide.

So skilled is error at imitating truth that the two are constantly being mistaken for each other. It is, therefore, critically important that the Christian take full advantage of every provision God has made to save him from delusion. These are prayer, faith, constant meditation on the Scriptures, obedience, humility, hard, serious thought and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.⁹

⁹ A W Tozer, That Incredible Christian

We see this for instance in the subject of *antichrist*. The word: *anti* used in *antichrist* does not so much mean *against* as: *in the place of*. He opposes Christ by pretending to be him, or in his Spirit, in an effort to delude Christ's followers.

The word (antichrist) means far more than simply 'an adversary of Christ'. As far as the form is concerned it may describe 'one who takes the place of Christ' or 'one who under the same character opposes Christ' ... assuming the guise of Christ (he) opposes Christ ... the adversary preserves the semblance of the characteristic excellence which he opposes.¹⁰

This is different from the *False Christ* of Mk 13:22 and Matt 24:24 (*pseudochristos*) who fools people to believe he is Christ returned from heaven, a pretender.

Westcott believes that the key lie of the antichrist is to teach that man is divine apart from God in Christ.¹¹ It is interesting that this idea is a prominent feature of Gnosticism which is very prevalent today in the form of New Age ideas and even false teaching in some parts of the church.

The antichrist spirit arises out of the church (1 Jn 4:1-6) and deludes people to follow him because he is seen to be acting as 'Christ' or in the place of 'Christ'. If he came openly raging against the Lord then no one would follow him. **The danger is in the imitation.**

The same truth is shown by the description of deceivers as wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15-20). The enemy is not obviously apparent. They use a clothing of truth to hide lies and then devastate the sheep once admitted to the fold. They could, therefore, be welcomed unwittingly. The sheep are then defenceless. The true shepherd will always prevent access to such. Note that Jesus said: 'Beware'! However, if admitted, false prophets are known by their fruit (Matt 7:16,20). This is revealed:

¹⁰ B F Westcott; *The Epistles of St John*, Marcham Manor Press, Abingdon, 1966; p70

¹¹ *ibid* p70

- in their character and conduct
- in their teaching
- in the effect of their teaching
- it is made obvious in failed prophecies

If there is failure in preventing admission of false prophets, either in person or influence, then strong action must be taken when the fruit is revealed. This must include total rejection and dismissal of the deceiver, care to restore people affected and repentance of the leaders involved.

It should also be borne in mind that false religions have been counterfeiting Biblical supernatural experiences for hundreds of years. All the gifts of the Spirit have their copies in the occult and false fundamentalist religions. In fact, many of the phenomena that have recently become more common in the church have been known in Oriental religions and cults for centuries (e.g.: visualising, channelling, falling down, levitation, miracles, words of knowledge, faith as a force etc.).

Mixture

God hates mixture. We see this very clearly in the Old Testament. The precious oils and spices used in the worship of God were not to be copied or mixed (Ex 30:22-38). Strange fire was punished by death (Num 3:4). Religious syncretism (i.e. the mixture of Israel's spirituality with the religion of surrounding nations), was repeatedly condemned. It inevitably led from religious matters to political alliances and its practice resulted in Israel's downfall.

Our religious experience can also be mixed. The key areas are:

- Divine and Satanic (e.g. Rev 2:19-24)
- Divine and human (e.g. 1 Cor 3:10-15)
- Satanic and human (e.g. Matt 16:22-23)

What God desires is that our actions are totally godly. This is achieved by our denying our own lives (Lk 9:23-24) and allowing God to work through us. He can give us the will and the power to work (Phil 1:13) so that the results are good works prepared by

God that we walk in (Eph 2:10).

Mixture is the result of deception where the enemy has imitated the divine and mingled it with the genuine. Eventually the result is a take-over of the false followed by ruin, unless the sufferer escapes the Devil's snare.

6. Through ourselves (self-deception) Gal 6:3

Unchecked zeal without knowledge

History, even recent history, shows that those who are zealous for the things of God are especially vulnerable to deception. Zeal for: holiness, power, godliness, responsibility, leadership positions and suchlike are all very dangerous unless there is a genuine self denial, humility, a careful examination of the Bible and especially a total reliance upon God.

Spiritual people are more vulnerable to deception because they are often more open. Maturity is no protection either. The more mature the target, the more subtle Satan's technique is, and his strategies have been perfected over thousands of years.

Strange as it may seem, the danger today is greater for the fervent Christian than for the lukewarm and the self-satisfied. The seeker after God's best things is eager to hear anyone who offers a way by which he can obtain them.¹²

It is no sin to doubt some things, but it may be fatal to believe everything. Faith never means gullibility. Credulity never honours God.¹³

The concept of surrendering to God is sound; we are his slaves after all (Rm 6:16), however, there is great danger in abandoning oneself to a force in the presumption that it is of God. This is especially hazardous in the case of supernatural power. Jessie Penn-Lewis speaks of godly men during the Welsh Revival who became demonized as a result of giving themselves up to supernatural power which they believed to be of God. The

¹² A W Tozer, Man: The Dwelling Place of God

¹³ A W Tozer, The Root of the Righteous

demonic force was clearly apparent in these men despite the fact that they were, 'in peace and fellowship with God.'¹⁴

7. Through Passivity

The Devil wants a vessel that he can control. Our mind and will are an obstacle to him. His objective is, therefore, to be able to bypass the will. A passive person who has yielded control is able to be used by Satan with ease. Many of the available false spiritual experiences abounding today result in varying degrees of passivity. Whenever you are told to just accept an experience or doctrine or leader without questioning - you are in danger. It is not wrong to check whether something is right or not, God, in fact, tells us to do so ¹⁵. The goal of this wrong demand is to get you to give up control. This is why drunkenness is evil, a drunk has no control and can be manipulated. Spiritual drunkenness has the same effect.

Self control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). How can it be of God to yield that up and become passive? **Passivity is possibly the greatest danger for a Christian in that it opens the door for the enemy to use you as he pleases. It should be avoided at all costs.** God requires co-operation with his children in his work, he uses all of man's faculties. He does not use pre-programmed zombies or machines. If he worked that way the Bible would not have been written by various characters of various employment with a variety of styles over 1500 years. God uses our intelligence, our emotions, our willing service, even our idiosyncrasies (Rm 12:1-2).

8. Through false guidance

Genuine guidance comes from the confluence of a variety of means so that the voice of God is very clear. These include: the witness of the Holy Spirit, circumstances, the Bible, sound advice from trusted mature friends and so on. We cannot develop this

¹⁴ Penn-Lewis, p96-97

¹⁵ See later: Defences against Deception

here. The point is that one does not make serious decisions on the basis of one of these alone without good reason. We are so prone to mistakes (Jm 3:2) that we need to take care in this since major decisions affect our whole lives.

It is a deception to follow experiences which the Bible does not endorse, even if at first sight there may seem to be a Biblical basis. I have in mind experiences like the following:

- compulsions
- dreams and visions
- angels
- isolated texts
- voices
- fleeces

Although one can find examples of guidance by these means in the Bible, it is clear that such is not the pattern after Pentecost. Now, we have the person of the Holy Spirit within us to lead us into all truth. Jesus said specifically that this was his ministry (Jn 16); he did not say that we would be led into truth by visions, angels etc. Why would God send an angel to speak to us when we are his children and he resides in us by his Spirit? Angels are to serve those who are to obtain salvation (Heb 1:14), i.e. protect the elect from fatal danger. Once they have received Christ, the Holy Spirit takes over personally as an indwelling presence. Such is the case with the other items.

The Holy Spirit is concerned with our character; his aim is our sanctification. He works in us to train us to choose correctly and gives us grace for every situation (Heb 4:16). It is an enabling us to choose. Deception, on the contrary is a forcing, a compulsion: the aim of this is to make us passive and pliable to the enemy. Those that choose false guidance will be bound up by the deception involved and open to yet further deceit.

We can recognise the activity of Satan in this area (e.g. false voices)

- He uses **compulsion**, God works with our will.
- He acts in **confusion**, often his voice is vague, you feel guilty

but you don't know what for. God speaks precisely, if he convicts of sin we know exactly what is wrong.

- His methods are **clamorous**, they are insistent, nervous, noisy, intense. God is peaceful in his dealings, even in his discipline.

THE PURPOSE IN DECEIVING

To lead astray

Tempting Christians to sin is not Satan's highest priority. He is no fool. Though he is no doubt pleased when Christians do sin, he is aware that forgiveness is available as well as complete restoration in Christ. No, he is after more permanent damage to individuals and the church. A Christian who trips and falls may well be still on the right path, but a Christian who wanders from the right way is heading for danger.

If he can get a church to go completely astray from the path of God then he has made a major advance. If, however, he can do this by fooling these people to think that they are acting this way in God's will, the devastation is exceedingly serious and will have continuing effects for years on this church and others influenced by its testimony.

Its results

- Hides the true knowledge of God (Jer 9:2-6)
- Diverts people from God (Jer 8:5)
- Builds up pride and oppression (Jer 5:26-28)
- Results in fraud, injustice, iniquity and ungodliness (Ps 10:7, 43:1)
- God hates it and will punish deceivers (Ps 5:6)
- Shows that the heart is wrong (Mk 7:20-23)
- Christians must avoid those who err (Rm 16:17-19)
- Deception brings judgment to those deceived by it (Jer 14:4)

An Example

Gen 27: JACOB STEALING ISAAC'S BLESSING

- Involves a curse as punishment (cf Matt 18:6) - **evil fruit ultimately**
- Involves delicacies to entice (v14) - **something you want**
- Involves another's costly clothing (v15) - **the support of false authority**
- Involves covering truth (v16) - **false impression given**
- Involves lies (v19) - **further false impression**
- Involves more complicated lies after stating God's support for the first lie (v20) - **still further false impressions**
- Takes away the true blessing (v27) - **i.e. it robs God's people**
- Summary : *'he came with guile'* (v35) -**i.e. deceit**

Doctrinal Tests of Deception

1. WHAT IS THE ATTITUDE TO THE BIBLE?

- Is the Bible upheld or undermined?
- Is the interpretation of it sound and sane?
- Are new and extreme doctrines being forced into scripture?
- Does the teacher's own interpretations have more value than scripture?
- Are you encouraged to check for yourself that what is said is true?

2. WHAT IS THE ATTITUDE TO THE PERSON OF CHRIST?

- Is Jesus yielded to as absolute Lord?
- Are there any subtle insinuations about his manhood, is there

- any questioning that he is a genuine human as well a God?
- Is Jesus accepted as equal and co-eternal with the Father?
 - Is Jesus referred to with reverence?

3. WHAT IS THE ATTITUDE TO THE ATONEMENT?

How big a place does the cross have?

- The cross is the place of Satan's downfall and Jesus' victory. It is obvious that the Devil will do all that he can to avoid teaching on this subject: in sermons, books, magazines, articles, songs, hymns, choruses, conversation etc. He hates to be reminded of the cross. If there is a fair degree of silence in this area, something is wrong.
- Are new and fanciful theories of atonement being propounded?
- Is anyone, anything or any idea being added to Christ in the means of atonement (i.e. is salvation Christ plus ...)?
- Is justification by faith being taught effectively?

4. WHAT IS THE ATTITUDE TO SIN?

- Is sin excused or downplayed?
- Is the law of Christ ignored?
- Are faults in the leadership confessed openly?
- Is public sin in the congregation dealt with effectively?

Defences against Deception

PREPARATION 1

The Truth sets you free

Deception arises in the mind which then becomes darkened and veiled by Satan (2 Cor 4:3-4). Once the mind is blinded, it becomes very hard to escape the deceit imposed on your thinking. The start is when wrong thinking is allowed into the mind.

Ignorance is a very real danger to believers (Matt 22:29). The best preparation, therefore, is to understand that only the truth can set you free and keep you free (Jn 8:32, 17:17). We must continue in God's word. This means that, at least, we must study the Bible comprehensively and systematically. Learn doctrinal truth based upon scripture; see how doctrines fit together. Use helpful resources like sound confessions of faith (e.g. the Westminster Confession, the Belgic Confession, the Baptist Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism etc.), and evangelical systematic theologies.

Don't just read the Bible as a source of daily blessing, though this is helpful, but understand its message, apply the truth to your life, see the wood for the trees. A full understanding of the whole counsel of God as revealed in the Bible is the best safeguard against deception.

Furthermore we must abide in the truth (Jn 8:32). The truth must be part and parcel of our lives not just a mental acceptance or an intellectual exercise. If the word of God exposes something in our lives, we must obey immediately. To refuse to submit to the truth will lead to deception (2 Thess 2:10-11).

PREPARATION 2

Don't trust in yourself

Deception is not moral at root, it affects the best and most spiritual people. It is wise, therefore, to understand that you too can be deceived, that you must rely totally upon God and his keeping power. Don't trust yourself, in the sense of thinking that you're safe and can never fall for a lie.

Don't be closed to fresh revelation of truth, in the sense of being shut in to a fixed, immovable position as if you have got everything figured out. Being stuck in the past can be a deception as well. Truth grows and develops. Move on with God.

PREPARATION 3

Seek God's will

Seek only to do God's will. Though this may sound obvious and simplistic, it is still clear that many in history have failed in this matter or we would not have seen so many cults, sects and errors in the church.

Seeking God's will should be a matter of daily prayer and discipline. If Jesus needed to pray for this (Matt 26:39,42,44; Jn 7:17), then I'm certain that we must.

One great danger is becoming so consumed by the work you are certain God called you to do, that you fail to seek God's will, trusting that you must be in it. A careful distinction should be noticed between God's will and God's work. Who knows but one day God may call you out of one work and into another. We must be attentive to God. The work we do for God must never become more important than what God wants us to do. Remember, deceit is getting us to wander from the way, from God's will.

PREPARATION 4

Put on the new nature

God's words are heard by him who is of God (Jn 8:47). Since we are so prone to sin and failure, it should be clear that we cannot simply trust that we will always hear God correctly. We have an old nature which is still being corrupted (Eph 4:22), which is influenced by the enemy. We must continually put this off as a daily exercise and put on the new nature which is Christ in us by his Spirit. In this new nature we have true communion with God. If we are in the flesh, we will not hear God.

PREPARATION 5

Focus on Christ alone

We must look to Jesus, nothing else, he must be our focal point (Heb 12:2). If we trust in our learning, our experience, our position or anything else, we will fail. Coming to Christ is glorious, but this stage of our lives is undeveloped infancy. Having received Christ, we must grow up into him more and more (Col 2:6-7). As we learn and appropriate more of Christ we become established in the faith. At the end of the day, real development is not one of head knowledge, necessary as that is for a foundation; it is a building up in Christ that counts. This development leads to the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

PREPARATION 6

The safety of fellowship

As we encourage one another in the faith, we help to prevent the inception of error (Heb 3:12-13). It is helpful to talk through those things that concern us or where we are uncertain about an issue. Those without good churches locally can still use the telephone to discuss perplexing matters. This is one reason why reading good books is an advantage. By reading we are listening to the thoughts

of men engrossed in a particular study (cf 1 Jn 4:6). If we read a wide variety of books, we can be continually learning from the wisdom of others. Isolation is deadly and makes us an easy target.

PREPARATION 7

Be filled with the Spirit

Apart from the fact that this is a Biblical command anyway (Eph 5:18), it is the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth (Jn 16:13) and brings the things of Jesus to us. He is our guide and *paraklete* (one who draws alongside us). As the Spirit of truth, he shows us what is false (1 Jn 4:6). If we are careful to remain filled with the Spirit of Christ, it will be very difficult for the enemy to overtake us.

PREPARATION 8

Sound Judgment

It is a deception to believe that Christians are never called to judge. In fact we are told many times in the New Testament to judge correctly. There are more statements telling us to judge than there are telling us not to. If we fail to make a proper judgment then we will suffer many things.

Restrictions on judging have to do with being in the right spirit. A judgmental attitude is justly condemned. Christians should not have a critical spirit. However, we are told that we must judge what is true teaching (Acts 17:11), judge who are true ministers of God (Matt 24:4-5; 1 Jn 4:1-3), judge those who pervert true doctrine (2 Jn 7-13; Titus 1:9-14), judge whom we should withdraw from (1 Cor 5:9-13) and so on. We are to prove what is the will of God (Rm 12:2) and test all things (1 Thess 5:21).

Before we embrace a doctrine, an experience, a teacher, a church etc, we must critically examine it to ensure that it is of God. Several of the words translated: *to judge* or *judgment* have the meaning of discernment, a critical distinguishing, examining to

make a separation. We must carefully check what we allow into our lives and test everything that affects us. In doing so we will help to prevent ourselves being deceived. ¹⁶

We should carefully note the warning given by Paul in 2 Cor 11:4 - it is possible to receive a different Jesus, a different spirit and a different gospel. The reason given for being in this terrible condition is: ready submission to something false.

Conclusion

The matter of deception must surely be seen as very serious. No one is immune and Christian leaders are especially targeted because of the influence they have over others. Why is it then that so few works are available to point out the dangers? In a time when the external, extreme, the superficial and supernatural are holding so much fascination for Christians, where are the studies and sermons exhorting believers to keep a careful guard over their inner life?

We are clearly warned that Satan will conceal his activities against us because that is to his advantage. Why are modern believers so anxious to dive deep into every new-fangled experience and doctrine that comes along; even those with a decidedly dubious pedigree? Such behaviour in the world would be considered stupid and gullible. No wonder Christians are being portrayed as wet fools on the current comedy circuit.

Spiritual experiences and all teaching has a spiritual background. It is either divine or satanic, pure and simple. Even if it is just fleshly and human rather than outright evil, poor teaching or fake experiences serve Satan's purpose admirably. What we subscribe to becomes part of us, it occupies our inner being. If we were to eat everything offered to us without care or consideration we

¹⁶ An article which examines this subject in more detail is available from this author.

would be ill and contaminate our inner organs. No one would be so foolish as to eat absolutely anything he was offered or encouraged to digest. Yet many have this attitude to spiritual matters when our innermost organs (our heart and mind) are in greater danger.

We must become more alive to the hazards of deception. We must begin, as the Lord's people, to test all things and prove what is the acceptable will of the Lord. Meanwhile, we must also seek to rescue the very many that have been sucked into one deception or another, whether of experience or teaching, with a heart of compassion and tenderness. May God have mercy on those that have been used to harm the Lord's dear ones. The severe warnings of Matthew 18:6-7 should be enough to terrify us all.

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