

The Difficulty in Discerning Deception

Introduction: the scope of the problem today

We have spoken about deception many times explaining its perfidious effects in the church.¹ Clearly the church in general has problems in identifying deception since it has tolerated both serious heresies and obvious false teachers for decades. The current terrible situation that the church is in results from a failure to identify obvious heretics.

Problem 1: the toleration of blatant false leaders and systems

For example, a recent Charismatic ‘prophet’ was fully supported by most evangelical leaders as leading a genuine revival (‘The Lakeland Revival’). However, his preaching was heretical; his ministry was blasphemous; his associations were heretics; the fruit of his ministry was unbiblical; his behaviour was ungodly and he even boasted about kicking an old woman in the face with ‘his biker boot’. There was never such an obvious case of a false prophet and yet famous leaders supported him in speech and in writing (and still do despite this person’s adultery coming to light).

So, yes, we have a serious problem in identifying even blatant false teachers who preach deception.

There are doctrinal systems that result in leaders teaching multiple heresies and many false practices; this is often the case in radical Charismatic and Jewish Root denomination, plus some older ecclesiastical systems. In such churches there are scores of false teachings and aberrant practices. People who remain in such places eventually have their consciences seared and see no problems unless God, in his grace, removes the blinkers. Deceived churches produce deceived people.

However, many local cases of deception do not involve total, outright, comprehensive heresies and occult practices but a few serious mistakes in an otherwise orthodox man. The problem is that deception grows if unchecked; what starts out as a few minor errors will develop into a multitude of problems in time.² It is well and good to see the heresy of the big examples, but local examples of deception must always be confronted as soon as possible. The problem is that many believers who are quick to confront Charismatic errors will tolerate false teachings and practices in their own church.

Problem 2: the toleration of misled leaders

Thus there is an equally serious problem whereby godly people are loathe to identify a leader they trust as a deceiver because he has a pleasant character, preaches the Gospel or appears humble in prayer - and yet he makes deeply erroneous church decisions which lead people astray.

Since the church is in the serious mess today that it is, then it means that most churches are being led by men who are bringing in false teaching and practices. It is undeniable, for example, that it is rare to hear the Biblical Gospel preached. Therefore, thousands of sincere Christians are supporting deceived men because they do not leave the erring church. Usually they hang on, despite deceptive heretical teachings and aberrant practices, because they feel that the church leader is godly; that he is humble, that he preaches well and because he says he is Christ-centred. False teachers are rarely obnoxious characters;

¹ Note especially my booklet, ‘*Deception: The Deadly Virus*’; available from Amazon or a free attachment from the author.

² 2 Thess 3:13, ‘evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.’

this is not conducive to gaining a following. Most deceiving leaders are self-deceived but well-meaning people who act sincerely and have godly aspirations.

The key cause of the problem of false leaders

The biggest problem in the church is that most people are so badly educated in the Scriptures that they cannot see any heresy and simply trust everything their favoured leader says. But what of those who do see it? Sometimes their misplaced loyalty is through fear of offending God; if the leader is so apparently sincere in aspirations he must be of God. Sometimes it is simply a commitment of trust in the leader, bolstered by his nice character. Sometimes it is the result of peer pressure; 'if everybody else trusts him then I should'. Sometimes the mistakes of the leader are noted but this is overridden by a mistaken obligation to forgive him everything he does wrong. At many other times it is a simple fear of the unknown; 'what do I do if I leave?'

The need to judge leaders

A key issue, widely unheeded, is that leaders are not to be treated like ordinary men. We constantly forgive our brother for his sins against us, though we may need to occasionally admonish him for his own good and he does need to repent (Lk 17:1-3); but generally we cover offences with love (Prov 10:12). However, the mistakes of a leader in his direction of the church are a different matter entirely.

Errors of teaching cannot be ignored because they do damage to the flock; errors must be repented of and dealt with. Just as the truth sets free so doctrinal errors bring bondage, and this cannot be ignored or excused because people's lives are at stake. Wrong practices introduced by a leader also bring damage to the flock because they are based upon errors of doctrine and lead God's children into wrong behaviour. These too cannot be ignored but must be removed or the church will suffer.

The church must have a zero-tolerance approach to the mistakes of leaders. Unorthodox teachings and aberrant practices cannot be ignored but must be repented of and dealt with. It is a great mistake to give a greater leeway to the mistakes of leaders than to ordinary believers. Even personal moral failings in a leader must be dealt with publicly³ because teachers are to be more strictly judged.⁴ However, many modern church leaders are bringing heretical doctrine and aberrant practices into the church with little or no effective confrontation at all because they are deemed to be 'nice'.

What are we to make of this situation?

Issues regarding discerning and dealing with deception

The congregation has a responsibility

If a church has accepted deceptive ideas then there are two types of people responsible. The first is the leader(s) who is bringing in heretical teachings and practices. Secondly, the congregation is also responsible since it has a duty to reprehend false teaching and confront it. If it sits and accepts false teaching without admonishment then it is guilty. Many thousands of believers today will one day have to give an account to God explaining why they did nothing in the face of known heresy.

³ 1 Tim 5:19-20, 'Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear'.

⁴ Jam 3:1, 'let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment'.

False teaching, being a blasphemy against the character of the God of truth, is always to be contended against. Toleration of a man teaching heresy is actually idolatry; it is a preference for a man above the need to obey God.

So leaders taking the people into any sort of deception must be disciplined; but how are we to discern if a leader is guilty or not?

Character is determined by what we do, not what we say

One person speaks softly, appears very winsome, acts humbly and prays lofty prayers; yet in their private life they make wicked decisions and live unrighteously. Another person is abrupt, insensitive, confrontational, over-zealous and passionate and yet leads a good life and makes righteous decisions. Which of these two types is the godly person?

It is a divine principle that the person that does right is right.

Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right. Prov 20:11

We are to determine the righteous person by what they actually do.

Jesus tells us that it is what we do that determines what we are, not what we aspire to or what we speak of doing.⁵ Our heavenly accountability and reward is based upon works not hopes.

For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. Matt 16:27⁶

No amount of praying, speaking wistfully, and hoping will get us a reward; we are rewarded for what we actually do.

In fact, the prayers of many people are empty words, emanating from their old nature. Only prayers inspired by the Holy Spirit in us will be answered and remembered (Rm 8:26; 1 Cor 14:15). People can pray deeply emotional and touching prayers that are a complete waste of wind. Divine prayers begin with God and end with God, passing through the new nature. I have heard people pray deeply impressive prayers that moved a company but were later found to be from a non-Christian con man. Humble prayers are not indicative of anything without correlating action.

The wicked *man* does deceptive work, but he who sows righteousness *will have* a sure reward. Prov 11:18

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. Matt 7:15-18

It is impossible for good men to do bad things. If a person is righteous, he will do right. If a church leader brings in policies that are unbiblical and deleterious then he is not righteous. According to the very words of Jesus bad fruit comes from a bad tree. False teachers are known by their fruit, by what they do. If a teacher brings false doctrine and bad practices, then he is false and must be confronted. If he fails to repent he must be rejected.

⁵ 'But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, "Son, go, work today in my vineyard." He answered and said, "I will not," but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, "I go, sir," but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?' Matt 21:28-31

⁶ See also Job 34:11; Ps 62:12; Prov 24:12; Isa 3:10-11; Jer 17:10, 32:19; Ezek 7:27; Rm 2:6; 2 Cor 5:10; Eph 6:8; 1 Pt 1:17; Rev 2:23, 22:12.

God judges actions

For the ways of man *are* before the eyes of the LORD, and He ponders all his paths. His own iniquities entrap the wicked *man*, and he is caught in the cords of his sin. Prov 5:21-22

God judges a man's ways. An evil heart will result in wicked actions and it is the actions that are judged. A man is trapped by his actual iniquities. Consequently, a deceiver is identified by his works and his fruit, not necessarily by his appearance.⁷

Righteousness must be performed and not just accepted as truth

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Jm 1:22

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin. Jm 4:17

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil. 1 Jn 3:7-8 [Deception is sin.]

For not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified. Rm 2:13

But what if a leader is generally good but makes some serious mistakes?

If a church leader brings in wrong strategies or teachings that lead to unbiblical actions then that leader has been deceived into doing something ungodly. God never leads his people into unbiblical measures; wrong strategies result from deception and temptation. No matter how humble and sincere the man may be, he now has to be approached as someone who has made a mistake and needs to repent and undo the strategy. All men make mistakes and if the man is genuinely godly he will repent upon being confronted and will not stick to an unbiblical strategy.

But if the man has made a number of bad decisions and does not repent then the question has to be raised as to whether he is really a wolf, despite how nice he may appear to be. One mistake may be easily fixed but a number of mistakes means that the church is on dangerous ground.

The way deception works

Satan would not get very far if every false teacher was as obvious as the example I mentioned in the introduction. Most of the devil's strategies are aimed at quietly perverting an otherwise good man to slowly get the church off track. A one-degree deviation from a course at the beginning soon misses the objective by thousands of miles.

It is a big trophy for Satan to get an orthodox church to miss the mark and sink rather than making an existing deceived church worse. This means that godly men are a special target of the enemy.

The way deception works is for the majority of the issues to be true and a few crucial ones false. Mix the lie in with a lot of truth to ensure deception. Thus the worst types of deception are found in people who appear godly and are good preachers. The men that commend loyalty because they appear to be godly, humble and Christ-centred become the worst types of deceivers because they deceive the best people.

This type of strategy is seen when Satan himself appears like an angel:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.

Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his

⁷ Wrong actions result from a false heart. In the Day of Judgment God will judge men's hearts and motivations so that even apparently good works may be condemned if they resulted from sinful motivations, such as pride. However, we cannot judge hearts, only God can, thus we must judge actual works.

ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. 2 Cor 11:14-15

To fool people Satan pretends to be an angel and thus deceive people into following his sin. If Satan did not pretend to be good then there would be no deception. False doctrine rides on the back of otherwise sound teaching; the overwhelming light hides a little speck of darkness.

Paul explains this in the context of false apostles, whom he accuses as using this same strategy. Thus they appear to be ‘ministers of righteousness’; that is, they seem to be godly men, Christ-fearing men. How are we to check this out? By judging these men according to their actual works. Now matter how righteous or godly they may appear to be, if they bring in unrighteous teachings and strategies then they are false apostles.

The fact that these men look righteous, humble, godly, Christ-centred, attractive, pleasant, and nice is irrelevant; they must be judged by what they actually do. If their deeds result in unrepentant bad teaching or bad practice, or anything unbiblical, then they must be treated as false teachers. The bulk of otherwise good teaching must be ignored and the smaller parts of false teaching must be highlighted and condemned in order to preserve the flock.

Now this is especially true if they claim to be following their conscience in applying these unbiblical measures. If this is true, then it proves that they are deeply deceived in their soul rather than making a superficial mistake; they are committed to an action that is unbiblical. The fact that a leader is following his conscience is dangerous if his conscience has been seared or damaged by false ideas.

For instance, the more a leader fellowships with other false teachers, the more his conscience will be damaged and corrupted. In time, it fails to convict him, so used has he become to false ideas in fellowship. His conscience now has failed to be a warning bell to wrong ideas. Thus when he adopts an unbiblical policy, he does so without any qualms and with full commitment. His deception is complete as his conscience complies with the deceitful teaching.

Examples and a test

The worst leaders in the modern church that I have met have all (with one exception who is truly evil) been exceptionally nice people. It has been very difficult to confront these men because one naturally wants to be friends with them (I have been a friend to some of them in the past). Such people are good deceivers because they influence the most people.

Now these people would hate to think of themselves as deceived; they thoroughly believe that what they teach and do is correct. They pray for God to lead them. They aspire to be Biblical. They are all winsome, attractive and humble. One in particular is softly spoken and very winsome; indeed he has prayed some of the most Christ-centred prayers I have ever heard. But they are all very wrong. Their conscience defends their policies but my conscience contends against them as ungodly and dangerous; even occult in most cases. How do we judge?

The only way we can evaluate this situation and discern what is right is to apply an absolute and objective test to the matter. What I think or what they think is unimportant; we need an objective rule. Thank God that in his mercy he gave us an objective and absolute rule to help us deal with issues like this. That rule is the Bible; only God’s word can resolve situations like this.

We compare the words and deeds of these men to Scripture so that any differences can be observed and disobedience seen. In doing this we see the many obvious departures from God's word in teaching and practice. As a result of this we can categorically state that their teaching and practice is unbiblical and, therefore, ungodly. Thus we can condemn their teaching and practice as heretical.

A Biblical example of deceivers who appeared pious

The scribes and Pharisees

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. ... But all their works they do to be seen by men. Matt 23:2-5

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Matt 23:27-28

An example from Scripture in the discipline of leaders

We have an example in Revelation of the way that Jesus himself evaluates church leaders. Now we can presume that these church leaders were apparently righteous or believers would not have followed them. We can presume that they were humble or they would not have been ordained. We can presume that they prayed godly prayers or they would not have continued in office. Thus these men led churches and were, to all intents and purposes, good men. But what does Jesus say:⁸

You have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place. Rev 2:5

Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight. Rev 2:16

You allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ... I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Rev 2:20-23

You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Rev 3:1

If you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. Rev 3:3

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked ... Rev 3:15-17

These Christian leaders had made a series of seriously wrong decisions that led to multiple cases of unbiblical actions and beliefs. The Lord gets to the heart of the issues and condemns them, demanding repentance. He did not take cognisance of the leader's humility, prayerfulness, or attractiveness; he demanded action and repentance.

The results of not discerning deception

- Dead churches produce dead people.
- Unrighteous churches produce unrighteous people.

⁸ In addressing the churches the Lord was pre-eminently addressing the church leaders who made the decisions that inspired his anger; in tolerating the errors the people were also responsible.

- Deceived churches produce deceived people.

The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, people who stay in deceived churches, that is churches which follow the teachings and practices of a deceived leader, are guilty for not fighting against the errors and eradicating them; thus the testimony of God is damaged by their inaction. The people share the guilt of the leader because they have tolerated the deception. Unless the people leave the work, then this guilt will work against them at the Day of Judgment and they will lose rewards for this guilt. [Note Jesus' criticisms of the whole churches in Revelation despite the fact that the original deception was the fault of the leaders.]

Secondly, the deceptions of the leader will gradually work their way into the hearts of those who are submitted to his ministry. Even those who disapproved of the errors, if they stay, will become contaminated by the deceptions. Deception is a path; it is a journey. It begins as a falling aside, a falling away from the truth; just as a person straying from the path is quite near to the path at first but in time finds himself hundreds of miles from the path if he does not correct his course. If this straying is not corrected then the person tolerating the deceit will gradually become more and more deceived.

Thus people under a ministry of death (which is what deception is; anything not of God is death⁹) will gradually become dead because they tolerate deception. Since deception is unrighteousness, the people gradually become unrighteous.¹⁰ Spiritual death and unrighteousness are bedfellows.

God demands perfect works¹¹ and thus it is impossible for genuine believers to tolerate any deception at all; it must be rooted out of the church. Any church leader who strives for less than perfection should be dismissed (and I have heard many elders say this!). Christ disciplines churches that fail to be as perfect as they could be.

For I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief.

Rev 3:2-3

What about those who initially confronted the errors but then relented?

Those folk who initially confronted deception in a leader are to be commended for doing this. They did this because their conscience demanded it; their conscience registered that the actions of the leader were wrong and they had to speak out. So well, so good. If the leader repents, they have won their leader and secured the church; God will bless all.

However, the refusal of the leader to see the truth leads such folk into trouble. They then have to either leave the church or submit. This is a crisis in the lives of such folk. If they leave the church God will bless them for their integrity; he will not let them suffer harshly; but their journey may be in a wilderness for a while.

However, if they relent and submit to the leader and the deception continues, then they will sear their conscience and sin against God. From that point their lives will not develop

⁹ Thus believers can produce dead works because they are not the fruit of faith (Jm 2:17, 20; 1 Tim 5:6; Rev 3:1). Prolonged submission to deception leads to the conclusion that there was never any genuine spiritual life. This is why Paul demanded that believers test themselves (2 Cor 13:5; Gal 6:4; Heb 4:1, 12:15).

¹⁰ 2 Pt 2:13, '[They] will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions'.

¹¹ This is a big subject. It means that our works must be righteous and mature in Christ; expressions of Christ. See: 'Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing' Jm 1:4. 'That you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God' Col 4:12. 'That they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me' Jn 17:23. 'You also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy"' 1 Pt 1:15-16.

spiritually. Our conscience must be obeyed when it is Scripturally educated and in line with God's word. In well-taught people it witnesses to God's law and drives our decisions, as the Holy Spirit uses it. If we go against our conscience we disobey God. This makes us unrighteous and no blessing will follow.

Make no mistake; those who understand deception when they see it must take a stand against it or they forfeit their growth in grace.

Why is the church universally filled with believers who have no understanding of the truth, do not walk by faith, live careless lives and exist for superficial emotionalism in meetings? It is because they calmly submit to errors, are loyal to deceived leaders, blindly absorb false teaching and have never grown in grace as a result. They live in sin and cannot even absorb the milk of the word.

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin. Jm 4:17

That servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. Lk 12:47

Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, "We see." Therefore your sin remains.' Jn 9:41

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Jn 15:22

Summary statements

What is deception?

There are many Greek words underlying the concept of deception in the New Testament. However, in summary they mean:

- Causing people to wander, to be led astray, wandering from the truth, falling into delusion, leading into error [*plane, planao*].
- Deceit, seducing to sin, trickery, false impressions, to cheat, to mislead, to beguile, to deceive or beguile wholly [*apate, apatao, exapateo*].
- To use a snare or bait, deceit, cunning, lure, treacherous, deceitful, to lure with bait, ensnare, corrupt, adulterate [*dolos, dolios, dolioo, doloo*].
- Other minor words meaning: corrupt, beguile, adulterate, reason amiss, draw false conclusions, trap, seduction, trick, entice.

The essence of deception is to be led away from the right path, from the truth. It covers all forms of falling away, including false teaching (falling away from the truth), false practices (falling away from God's commands for the church) and wrong behaviour (falling away from Christian ethics).

Deception is anything that is not in accordance with God's word that results false teaching, false practice or wrong behaviour.

Examples of deception

- *Heresy*: teaching which has strayed from the path of God's word.
- *Compromised church practices*: deception which has led a leader to corrupt the way that the church does certain things. [E.g. a clergy/laity split, singing unsuitable songs; using musical instruments; failing to break bread.]

- *Aberrations in church practice*: deceitful teaching that has led the Lord's people to do wrong things in church meetings. [E.g. falling down, dancing, screaming, behaving uncontrollably or disorderly, sacramentalism, idolatry.]
- *Unrighteousness*: immoral behaviour that results from deceived beliefs.
- *Ecumenism*: deceitful teachings that have corrupted the purity of the church and led to wrong associations.
- *Authoritarianism*: deception that has led God's people to focus upon a man instead of God and to ignore Biblical teachings on leadership and the priesthood of all believers. This is essentially idolatry.

The root of deception

The essence of deception is really idolatry; it is the preference for something instead of submitting to God. Heresy is following a teaching that results from disobedience to God; preferring a lie to the truth in God. Since lies come from the devil, heresy is preferring the devil to God.

Regarding the church, Christ has given us principles and commands to ensure that we conduct ourselves according to his will. The NT is very clear in expressing these principles so that all can see them. So, for instance, when a church leader takes money from the Lord's people to build a building to gather a large church to sit under his authoritative ministry, then that church has been deceived and is preferring a man instead of Christ. The man has wasted the Lord's money and set the focus of the people on material things rather than the Lord.

We could multiply examples but the root issue is that deception leads people away from God. Deception is not just the main 'big' heresies but any teaching or practice which disobeys God's word. The devil uses small deceits first to lead a church in the wrong direction and, over time, these are multiplied until, at the end, the church is thoroughly deluded. Minor errors become major errors if left without confrontation.

The Biblical antidote to deception

- The Bible causes us to focus upon Christ pre-eminently.¹² Anything that diverts us from centring on Christ is deception.
- The Bible gives us clear ethical commands to follow.¹³ Deceived people fail to obey these laws.
- The Bible gives us clear principles that establish correct practices.¹⁴ Ignoring these principles is the result of deception.
- The Bible shows us apostolic precedents that lead to establishing divine ordinances.¹⁵ It is deception that leads people to ignore these.
- The Bible gives us severe warnings about straying from the truth. This straying is deception; it results in harlotry plus being cursed and rejected.¹⁶
- The Bible gives us everything we need to know about life and godliness. 'From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for

¹² Col 1:17-18, 'And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence'.

¹³ E.g. Rm 6:12, 'do not let sin reign in your mortal body'. Jn 13:34, 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another'. 2 Tim 2:22, 'Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart'.

¹⁴ Such as the church meets in homes not dedicated buildings.

¹⁵ Such as celebrating the Lord's Supper every Sunday as a memorial of the cross.

¹⁶ E.g. Ps 119:21, 'You rebuke the proud -- the cursed, who stray from Your commandments'. Ps 119:118, 'You reject all those who stray from your statutes, for their deceit is falsehood'. Hos 4:12, 'The spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God'.

correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.' (2 Tim 3:15-17). *'The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.'* (Westminster Confession of Faith; 1:6).

Reasons why discerning deception is difficult

1. The people in the church do not lean upon their Bible as God's authoritative word and therefore have no light to expose darkness.
2. The people are so transfixed by the authority of the leader that they never consider evaluating his teaching.
3. The people in the church read their Bible to some degree but have such a poor understanding of sound doctrine that they fail to see the deception.
4. The people read their Bible but are so bound by human tradition that Scripture is superseded by the words of men.
5. The people read their Bible and have some understanding of doctrine but choose not to confront the deception; or they initially confront the deceit but then do nothing. This can be for several reasons: a) they are afraid; especially a mistaken fear of offending God. b) They trust in the leader, despite his deception. c) They are threatened by peer pressure. d) They mistakenly believe that they should forgive the leader all things. e) They have nowhere else to go to.

Conclusion

The only way that we can evaluate the soundness of a church leader is to observe what he actually does and compare it with Scripture. If he has introduced false teaching, aberrant practices or ecumenical strategies into the church then he is deceived and is deceiving. He must be confronted by the members and disciplined. If there are insufficient members able to do this, then the only recourse is to leave that work. Failure to do this leads first to being complicit in the guilt of failing to confront the errors and then to being gradually affected by the deception personally.

Deception that is not dealt with always spreads.

Let no one deceive you by any means. 2 Thess 2:3

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