

The Path of Deception

Introduction

In our previous lesson we were looking at what Paul had said to the Elders of Ephesus in the book of Acts where he gave us two categories of deceptive people for which we were to be on alert: [1] savage wolves from without, and [2] men from within the leadership who speak twisted things in order to draw disciples after themselves.

Acts 20:29-30 NASB

- (29) "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;
- (30) and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

It is the second category that is the most dangerous to us because they are the least obvious and the most deceptive. We saw that they operate according to the “spirit of Diotrephes”, which likes to have pre-immanence among the believers—to be first, the leader, the head.¹

This lesson will look at the pathway that leads to the rising of deception within our own ranks and especially in the area of leadership.

The Unrenewed Mind

Before knowing the Lord, we lived our lives fully in and under the “world system”, which is contrary to the plans and purposes of God. John told us very clearly that loving the world and loving the Father are not compatible.

1 John 2:15-16 NASB

- (15) Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
- (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

The world system plays on ambition and the desire for power. When believers are still attached to the world, they are open to these carnal forces also. The Scriptures tell us that “He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,” ([Colossians 1:13 NASB](#)); however, they also tell us, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,…” ([Romans 12:2 NASB](#))

¹ 3 John 1:9-10

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Those who are satisfied with being “rescued and transferred” are open to deception that is driven by our old self, our carnal nature, unless we are also “transformed” by the renewing of the mind. Even though we have been “rescued and transferred” our thinking processes still follow the worldly ways. This is one of the primary problems of our modern “church” system.

Our soul determines “who we are”, our sense of self-identity. Until coming to Christ, the three components of our soul—the will, the intellect, the emotions—are completely immersed in the world and the things of the world.² When we are “born again” we receive a new spirit but not a new soul—it's the same one we have had all along and it is filled with a worldly identity and affection. However, the Lord does not leave us in that state.

As the life and power that has come into our spirit begins to find expression in our life, it begins in us the process of renewing our minds, which actually transforms us.³ It is the blood of Jesus that redeems us, but it is the life of Jesus that transforms us—conforming us to the image of Christ, causing us to live out of our new nature and not our old nature.

Our old man, who we were before knowing the Lord, is inexorably tied to the world and the things of the world—the passions, desires and ambitions of our old life. Our new man is born from above and is tied to the Lord and the things of the Kingdom of God.

Ephesians 4:22-24 NASB

- (22) that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,
- (23) and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,
- (24) and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

As you can see, this procedure is not something that the Lord does for us. Our wills have to become actively involved in the process of putting off the old self and putting on the new self. It is a three step process: [1] laying aside the old self; [2] being renewed in the spirit of the mind; and [3] putting on the new self. This does not happen in an instant. It is a process that takes time.

Since this involves our former manner of life and our new manner of life, we tend to try to skip step two and by cleaning up our conduct move on to step three while still operating with an unrenewed mind. So, if the visible conduct of a person appears acceptable and their testimony is dramatic and they have an outgoing personality, we make room for them in leadership. We see this regularly with sports stars, rock stars and other media personalities. Therefore, we end up with leadership that is operating from natural understanding with the strength of the flesh, the old man, and not from the power of the Spirit.

There is a reason that an elder is not to be a novice, a new convert. It takes time for the renewing of the mind to occur; for the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new. It takes time for a person to learn experientially how to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. It takes time for a person to begin to come into some level of maturity. It takes time for the image of Christ to be formed in us. It

2 For more detail on body, soul and spirit see the “Nature of Man” section of the [Blueprint Series: Foundation Principles](#).

3 Romans 12:2

takes time for a person to learn that all of his natural abilities are worthless to God. It takes time for a person to learn to completely depend on the Lord and not on himself.

The Downward Path

All of this comes back to a “heart” issue: What is driving the heart? This is where our motives are revealed—the thoughts and intents of the heart. We can only know another's heart by their words and conduct, just as Jesus said.

Luke 6:45 NASB

- (45) "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil *man* out of the evil *treasure* brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Our problems arise when we forget that we have in us both a good “heart” and an “evil” heart—an old man and nature and a new man and nature. We can bring forth treasure from either one. James makes this clear.

James 3:10-11 NASB

- (10) from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.
(11) Does a fountain send out from the same opening *both* fresh and bitter *water*?

James is speaking of the tongue and what comes forth from us. Obviously, we know from experience that both blessing and cursing can come out of the same mouth. But, James tells us that it should not be that way—a fountain or spring cannot from the same opening bring forth both fresh water and bitter water. The fact that this does happen in our lives means that there are two springs within us—one bringing forth bitter water from the old man and one bringing forth fresh water from the new man. We choose which one finds expression through our lives. Like all springs, the one that is used most will increase its flow while the one that is neglected will decrease.

From this idea, James gives us the downward path of deception.

James 3:15 NASB

- (15) This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

There are three steps to full blown deception in this verse: [1] earthly, meaning of the earth, natural principles; [2] natural, meaning “of the soul”, soulish⁴; and [3] demonic, meaning demon-like.

These three steps relate to wisdom meaning that these are three forms of wisdom, which begin with the earthly but end with the demonic. The fourth type of wisdom, according to James, is “that which comes down from above” meaning spiritual wisdom that comes by revelation from the Holy Spirit.

⁴ The Greek word is *psuchikos*, the adjective form of the Greek word for soul. We don't have an adjective form for soul in the English language so I am using 'soulish' as an adjective in the same manner that I would use 'spiritual' as an adjective for 'spirit'. The NASEC gives this definition for *psuchikos*: *natural, of the soul or mind*.

So, what, exactly, is the meaning of the word “wisdom”? The Webster electronic dictionary defines wisdom in this manner: *“The right use or exercise of knowledge; the choice of laudable ends, and of the best means to accomplish them. This is wisdom in act, effect, or practice. If wisdom is to be considered as a faculty of the mind, it is the faculty of discerning or judging what is most just, proper and useful, and if it is to be considered as an acquirement, it is the knowledge and use of what is best, most just, most proper, most conducive to prosperity or happiness.”* So, in everyday language, wisdom is knowing how to apply your knowledge and experience for the best outcome.

When we apply this definition to James' words, the directing force of our wisdom can come [1] from above; [2] from natural, earthly principles; [3] from the desires of the soul and unrenewed mind; or [4] from demonic forces.

A carnal Christian is one who is operating from their old nature, the old man. They are functioning from an unrenewed mind that is still mired in worldly thinking. Paul tells us that they cannot accept the things of the Spirit because they appear to be foolishness to them⁵. While they cannot see the things of the Spirit, they can see the natural principles of the world and will apply these to spiritual things. An example of this is “the law of sowing and reaping”. While there is a spiritual application of this principle, earthly wisdom wants to apply it to all things that are desired by the flesh. So, if you want to reap a financial “harvest” you have to sow a financial “seed”, when in fact the finances of the Kingdom of God operate from a different principle than this earthly one.

Without spiritual insight, these carnal Christians create deceptive doctrines based on earthly principles that lead many astray and cause much harm to the people of God. While I have only given one example above, you can turn on almost any Christian television channel and hear many others.

Once a carnal Christian begins to operate by earthly principles, the soulish, natural desires of the old man come forth. Look at what Paul says of this.

Ephesians 2:2-3 NASB

- (2) in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.
- (3) Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Before knowing Christ, our lives were lived [1] according to the course of this world and [2] according to the prince of the power of the air. As a result, our lives were lived in the lusts of our flesh, which were of two types: [1] desires of the flesh and [2] desires of the mind. It would be natural then that after knowing Christ, if we did not continue in His word, we would remain carnal Christians still living according to the course of the world and the devil even though we might be surrounded by a Christian environment.

Once a carnal Christian begins operating in an earthly manner, it is natural for him to continue in a soulish way based on the desires of the mind, which would include position, power, honor and similar things. Our hierarchical church system is perfect for these types to indulge themselves striving to

⁵ I Corinthians 2:14

fulfill their ambitions in the hierarchy, to draw disciples after themselves, to build an empire with themselves as the head. They apply the methodologies of the world system to their dreams of empire and their desire to “have authority” over others.⁶

When this occurs, they are now open to demonic empowerment of the desires of their minds. Their unrenewed minds begin to receive and accept demonic “thoughts” as if they are their own thoughts. These all play on the desires of the old nature causing them to be lifted up in pride and arrogance even to the point of causing the person to believe that the requirements of holiness and righteousness don't really apply to them anymore.

Spiritual Wisdom

James contrasts the three wisdoms from the downward path to the true wisdom which comes down from above.

James 3:17 NASB

(17) But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

True spiritual wisdom will have these eight characteristics:

- [1] pure, that is, righteous, holy, clean;
- [2] peaceable, that is, not contentious;
- [3] gentle, that is, not dictatorial or overpowering;
- [4] reasonable, that is, fits the circumstances, makes spiritual common sense;
- [5] full of mercy, that is, not condemning;
- [6] full of good fruits, that is, productive in the things of the Spirit and of the Kingdom;
- [7] unwavering, that is, steadfast, not double-minded;
- [8] without hypocrisy, that is, applies to all without exemptions.

If we test the actions of our leaders by these eight characteristics, we will not have any difficulty exposing those who are operating from a different wisdom than that which comes from the Spirit of God.

We need to set ourselves to know the Word of God, the character of God and the ways of God or we will be unable to discern deception when it appears. The ways of God and the life of the Kingdom of God are in stark contrast to the ways of the world and the life of the world system. It is important that we see the contrasts and understand the differences because the tendency is to only look at the benefits for ourselves. Benefits always appeals to the flesh, our old nature. That is why so much deception comes with various types of “manifestations”. We don't want to examine the “manifestations” too closely because we like what is happening—its exciting or unusual.

One of the characteristics of the closing of this age is the tremendous increase in deception. The man

⁶ Jesus expressly forbids this hierarchy of authority in Mark 10:42-44. In the area of “authority” and its application and function, the people of God operate according to a different principle than that which operates in those who walk according to the world system.

of lawlessness will perform lying signs and wonders. God, Himself, will help this along by sending a strong delusion to those who do not love the truth so that they will believe what is false⁷.

Recap

Wisdom that begins as earthly understanding soon becomes soulish application and then becomes demoniacally empowered. The result of this downward progression is always deception. This is the clear pathway of deception that is so prevalent in the American church and ministry system.

The way to avoid this path is to continue in His word⁸, be transformed by the renewing of the mind⁹ and receive a love of the truth¹⁰.

7 II Thessalonians 2:3-12

8 John 8:31-32

9 Romans 12:2

10 II Thessalonians 2:10