



Deception was the vehicle which the serpent used to transport sin into the human race, as Eve, "being quite deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Tim. 2:14 NASB). Deception continues to be Satan's most effective device in keeping men from knowing and doing the will of God.

Deceit is "the act of representing as true what is known to be false" causing its victim to adopt the false. More simply defined, deceit is "lying." A brief survey of New Testament references to deceit and deception confirms this definition.

Our Lord establishes that Satan is the source of lying and deceit while dialoguing with the Jews who opposed His teaching. "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, *because there is no truth in him*. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; *for he is a liar, and the father of lies*" (John 8:43,44 NASB). Satan's motive in the beginning was murder, and the

weapon he used was lying and deception. His motive and method remain unchanged.

According to Paul, Satan's agents also use the method of deception. When certain men attempted to disrupt and destroy the Church at Corinth, Paul described them as "false apostles, *deceitful workers*, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness: whose end shall be according to their deeds" (2 Cor. 11:13-15 NASB).

Not only do the Scriptures warn against the deception of false ministers, but also against demonic deception and seduction.

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times [seasons] some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to *deceitful spirits* and doctrines of demons, by means of hypocrisy of *liars* seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron (1 Tim. 4:1,2 NASB).

These "deceitful spirits," dedicated to the promulgation of satanic error, must find willing humans through whom they can communicate their lies. Such humans are described in terrible terms as hypocritical "liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron." This corresponds with descriptions of these false apostles, prophets, and teachers given elsewhere, especially in 2 Peter 2 and Jude 4-16.

The considerable number and distinctive characteristics of these purveyors of diabolical delusion was a matter of grave pastoral concern to our Lord and His apostles, evidenced by the many warnings issued to their people. In Matthew 24:4-24, Jesus warns that there will arise false prophets who will use signs and wonders to *deceive* even believers. Romans 16:17-18 describes those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to sound teaching, who *deceive* through smooth and flattering speech. Ephesians 4:14 says we are to no longer be children, tossed about with every wind of doctrine and

deceitful scheming. Titus 1:10–11 describes rebellious men, empty talkers and *deceivers* who upset people with their teaching and teach for sordid gain. 1 John 4:1 entreats us to test the spirits, and 2 John 7 tells us why: “For many *deceivers* have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.”

Thus, the Bible makes it plain that a principal battle for every Christian is against the agents that Satan uses in his attempts to deceive us.

DECEPTION IN MANKIND

Before we look further at deception in the realm of professing Christianity, it might be well to observe that all who have not become partakers of the grace of God are living in deception. That person who has not “obeyed the Gospel” and come under the lordship of Christ, whether he knows it or not, is living in spiritual and moral deception. In reproving the Pharisees and scribes for their externalism, our Lord pointed out that deceit is an inherent part of *every* man: “For from within, out of the *heart of men*, proceed evil thoughts and fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as *deceit*, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man” (Mark 7:18–23 NASB). In case anyone wants to argue with our Lord’s verdict, insisting it does not apply to him, Jeremiah reached the same conclusion – “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it [understand it]?” (17:9).

It is the nature of deception that the deceived are blinded to their own true condition. Paul says the God-rejector is “*filled with deceit*.” (Rom.1: 29). Writing to Titus, and referring to what the Christian was before experiencing “the kindness of God our Savior and His love,” he also says, “we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, *deceived* [the order is significant], enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in

malice and envy, hateful, hating one another” (3:3,4). Deception is a universal element in all unregenerate mankind.

ADAM AND EVE’S DECEPTION

The human race is related to two men, Adam and Christ. All men are either “in Adam” or “in Christ” (1 Cor. 15:22). “Through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12 NASB).

The story of the fall, though familiar to all of us, is essential for our topic. Satan, through deceiving Eve, had precipitated Adam’s disobedience. Adam believed Satan’s lie. God had clearly stated, “From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil *you shall not eat*, for in the day that you eat from it *you shall surely die*” (Gen. 2:17 NASB). Over against this explicit statement of divine *truth*, Satan presented his brazen *lie*. “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). He then proceeded to embellish his murderous lie, stating that the act of disobedience would make them “like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). The implication was obvious. They would assume a posture of authority, power and majesty independent of their Creator.

What they did not know was that God’s reason in forbidding the eating of the fruit of this particular tree was to *protect* them from “knowing good and evil.” As long as Adam remained obedient to God, he had no problem with evil. He lived under God’s perpetual protection. Evil could not touch him as long as he refrained from violating the one command God had imposed upon him. God’s prohibition was designed for his welfare, but Satan succeeded in convincing Adam that the prohibition was a deliberate act of God to keep the man from realizing his true destiny.

The lure of Satan’s lying deception was the implication that acquiring “the knowledge of good and evil” was the key to being “like God.” Like all deception, this contained an element

of truth. (In fact, after the fall, “the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us, *knowing good and evil*’ ” Gen. 3:22 NASB). But to Adam and Eve, the serpent’s enticing promise of Godlike independence was too attractive to refuse. They became the first to discover the awful consequences of believing “the father of lies.”

Having eaten the fruit, they found themselves anything but Godlike; rather, trembling in the grip of a strange and terrible new sensation called “fear,” they beheld their “nakedness.” They then “sewed fig leaves together, and made [for] themselves aprons” (Gen 3:7). This became the first pitiable human attempt at self-salvation, as they manufactured a self-covering to replace the forfeited covering God had provided during their time of obedience to Him. Now hiding “among the trees of the garden” they awaited the inevitable confrontation with God.

When God came to His fear-filled creatures, hiding among the trees, He spoke directly to the one to whom He had delegated authority and leadership, calling “unto Adam.” The ensuing conversation revealed that the poison of lying and deceit had already contaminated the Adamic nature, and Adam, made cowardly and deceitful by his disobedience, lied about his own deliberate act by trying to lay the blame on Eve, and indeed, on God Himself. “The *woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat*” (Gen. 3:12). Turning to the woman, God found that she was equally infected with the dread disease, as she also tried to deceive God by blaming the serpent, saying, “. . . the *serpent* beguiled [deceived] me, and I did eat” (Gen. 3:13).

If it is true that “misery loves company,” then Satan had increased the host of his miserable companions by two. Adam and Eve became victims of the same unrighteous ambition and pride that had previously brought Satan from the high place of being “the covering cherub” before the throne of God, to divine judgment and

expulsion from heaven. It had all started when he announced his aspiration to Godlikeness, declaring, "I will be like the Most High" (Ezek. 28:11-19; Isa. 14:12-14). He himself had tried and failed in the very thing he had persuaded Adam and Eve to attempt. He knew that they would suffer his same fate, and therein lay the great lying deception. They did not become "as God" just as he had not become "like the Most High." Adam was dethroned as earth's delegated ruler just as Satan had been deposed as God's delegated "covering cherub."

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

It is abundantly clear from the Scripture that from the time of the fall, man's salvation from the dread consequences of deception rests on his renunciation of Satan's lie. There must be a return to submissive obedience to "the truth" as graciously revealed in God's Word. This "truth sets us free" to experience the divine way of forgiving our sin, and reveals the manner in which our lives can be structured to become sin-conquering, Satan-resisting, self-fulfilling, society-serving, and above all, God-glorifying.

The soul-saving necessity of rejecting Satan's lie and embracing God's truth is made graphically clear by Paul's description of God's judgment at the end of the age. He tells what will happen to Satan's last and most outstanding leader of diabolical rebellion in the earth, and to all those who have chosen to follow him. The language is significant in the light of all we have said to this point.

And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false [lying] wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false

[the lie], in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness (2 Thess. 2:8-12 NASB).

Men will be judged because they believe "the lie," and not "the truth." Paul puts the responsibility for the condition of deceived and wicked men directly upon themselves. "They did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." Jesus said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:20).

When God dealt with Adam and Eve and the serpent, He ignored the attempt of both Adam and Eve to transfer their guilt. He dealt with each on the ground of their individual action, regardless of the influences which may have precipitated their personal decisions. Each was judged for his own behavior. This is a principle of divine judgment which the Scriptures enunciate.

O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways (Ezek. 33:20 NASB).

This exact precept is found also in Matt. 12:36; Rom. 2:6; Rom. 14:12; 1 Pet. 1:17; and Rev. 20:13. All of these references verify that in God's eyes, man is personally accountable for his own deception, and he will be judged accordingly.

ARE WE RESPONSIBLE?

Although we all may generally agree on the justice of this principle from Scripture, it is nevertheless a probing and disturbing word. Basically, this is the question facing us: "Are we to be held responsible when we are deceived?" Each of us can recall times when we have succumbed to deception of one kind or another, and treated it as something for which we were not personally responsible. We blamed it on the "times of accelerated demonic activity" in which we lived, and thus excused ourselves by taking it out of the category of sin. However, by doing so, we've left ourselves in a condition of perpetual vulnerability to deception.

Could it be that the Holy Spirit is specifically directing our attention to this matter of deception because we have been "foggy" about it, perhaps even neglecting the means provided to counter it? We do not ask this question to be condemnatory, but rather to point out that we have had, and may yet have, an area of ignorance and irresponsibility which serves as an open door for deception.

All Bible warnings against deception presuppose that man, walking in obedience, is equipped and responsible to recognize and deal with it. God certainly wouldn't warn us against being deceived if it were not possible for us to obey the warning. We suggest that deception can only enter where there is an opening.

When Jesus was coming to the hour of His final confrontation with Satan, knowing what lay before Him, He spoke these significant words to His disciples. "I shall not talk much longer with you, for the prince of this world approaches. He has no rights over me; but the world must be shown that I love the Father, and do exactly as He commands; so up, let us go forward" (John 14:30-31 NEB). Satan had "no rights over" Jesus because of our Lord's unbroken relationship through obedience to the Father. Someone has suggested a modern equivalent to the words "has no rights over me" as "finds no landing strip in me." Jesus had not provided a place in His life where Satan could land and establish a base of operation.

The Word of God clearly reveals that we are responsible in the same way for defense against deception. Jesus warns in Matthew 24:4 "See to it that no one misleads [deceives] you. 1 John 3:7 warns, "Little children, let no one deceive you . . ." "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33); "Let no one deceive you with empty words . . ." (Eph. 5:6); "Let no one in any way deceive you . . ." (2 Thess. 2:3); "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren" (Jas. 1:16).

A further proof that men are responsible for allowing themselves to

be deceived is the fact that God judges them for it. If allowing oneself to be deceived is not blameworthy, then the deceived person should not be subject to divine penalty.

However, as we have seen from the Scriptures, every man *is* responsible for his own actions, and the Lord charges men with the responsibility for withstanding deception. It is a *principle* of divine judgment. At the final judgment, man will not be allowed to plead that "Satan made me do it," or "I was a victim of deception." The garden of Eden provides us with a preview of God's unchanging principle. Though Adam attempted to blame Eve for his action, and Eve attempted to blame the serpent, God judged each of them for their *individual* sin.

"I WILL"

In light of our accountability, "I will" and "I will not" become the most important words in the human vocabulary. Without being technical, let us simply say that the human will is the ability to make decisions and choices that determine conduct. Since the "entrance of sin" and Satan into the world, man has been surrounded by powerful forces which present him with options. God and His rightful claims upon His creatures stand over against the forces of Satan and sin which put forth a soul-destroying counterclaim.

It is at this point that man exercises his will in life's greatest decision. "I will hear the good news of God's love and His desire to forgive my sins. I will turn from the darkness of sin to the light of righteousness. I will renounce Satan and all his works and give myself as completely to God and righteousness as ever I did to Satan and sin. And I will gratefully receive God's forgiveness and become one of God's people, a member of the redeemed community."

Paul tells us that the whole saving process begins by believing God's Word, and declaring our intention to submit the whole life unreservedly to the supreme authority of Jesus Christ. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus

as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Rom. 10:9 NASB). By this act of the will, one releases the authority and power of God into his life, so that he can be freed from the dominion of Satan and sin, and enter a new life of righteousness in Christ. This is the foundation for the restructuring of life in every area of its being and expression, and the basis for withstanding deception.

THE WILL TO DO HIS WILL

Having become a Christian by initial obedience to the Word of God by the "I will" of the conversion experience, we must understand that from this point on we should continue to say "I will" to every commandment of our Lord. Paul established this with unmistakable clarity. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him" (Col. 2:6).

So much emphasis is often placed on "coming in" that "continuing on" is often neglected. The first disciples certainly had a dynamic "coming in," but it is also said of them that "they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). This agrees with the pattern of discipleship laid down by our Lord. "If you abide [continue] in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31,32 NASB).

The failure to comply with the command to "continue" has brought much sorrow and deception into Christian lives. The "I will" of conversion is just the beginning of a life of "I wills" in response to every commandment of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The prerequisite for God's continued illumination and direction is the *determination to do His will*. In the days of our Lord's earthly ministry, great controversy arose among His listeners as to His authority and the source of His teaching, especially among religious Jews. Hearing their remarks, "Jesus therefore answered them, and said, 'My teaching is not

Mine, but His who sent Me.' " What He said next needs to be heard clearly by all of us. "If any man *is willing [wills] to do His will*, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself" (John 7:12,15-17). There is no need to be uncertain or deceived. If our will is set to *do His will*, He will reveal His truth and protect from deception. A constant and unequivocal "willingness to do His will" is the *only* safeguard against the incursion of deception and sin into the Christian life.

When we *do not* set our will to "do the will of God" we open ourselves to self-deception. In an attempt to quiet the disturbing voices of the Spirit and conscience, we evolve specious arguments to excuse our conduct. James refers to this: "Be ye *doers* of the word, and not hearers only, *deceiving your own selves*" (James 1:22).

An unwilling will also exposes us to sin-deception. Israel in the wilderness "hardened their hearts" and willed *not* to "hear His voice," with the tragic consequences of idolatry and immorality.

And finally, where the will is not committed to "do the will of God," there is Satan-deception. Paul's epistles to the Corinthians were written to urge the church in that city to renounce its disobedience and restore a will to practice righteousness. Their defection had opened the door to false ministers, because they were unable to detect deception. "I am afraid," wrote Paul, "lest as the serpent *deceived* Eve by his craftiness, that your minds should be *led astray* from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3 NASB).

Let us "will to do the will of God." Jesus, the "author and finisher of our faith" provided the pattern of obedience for us: "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith . . . Lo, I come to *do Thy will*, O God" (Heb. 10:5,9). Here, and only here is found protection against deception with all its fearful consequences. Herein is found the divine intention for our lives and the exquisite joy that we are meant to experience. ♣