

Deception Is an Election

by David Servant

David Servant's sermon explores the nature of deception in spiritual matters and emphasizes the importance of discerning true messengers of God through holiness and testing of the heart.

Scripture: Matthew 7:15

Topics: "Spiritual Deception", "Divine Revelation"

Description

David Servant delves into the topic of deception by false spiritual leaders, emphasizing God's desire for everyone to know and believe the truth. He explores the reasons why God allows deception to exist, highlighting the importance of divine revelation in Christianity to ensure believers are not misled. The sermon also touches on the criteria for identifying true messengers of God, the dangers of following miracle-workers without holy lives, and the significance of testing to reveal what is truly in people's hearts.

Transcript

In last month's e-teaching, There's a Sheep Born Every Second, we considered what we should do to avoid being deceived or misled by false spiritual leaders, those wolves in sheep's clothing of which Jesus warned us. Obviously, God doesn't want us, or anyone for that matter, to be deceived regarding spiritual and eternal matters. He wants everyone to know and believe the truth (see 1 Tim. 2:4). For that reason we might ask, If God doesn't want anyone to be deceived, why doesn't He just put an end to deception and deceivers?

The Bible's answer to that question is quite interesting, and it opens a vista of insight into the very purpose of life itself.

Before we begin to consider Scripture's answer, however, let's recognize some basic principles about truth and deception. First, let's acknowledge the undeniable fact that if He so desired, God could put an end to any and all deceivers as well as any and all deception. To say otherwise is tantamount to saying that God's power is limited, and there is a force in the universe stronger than the One who created the universe. That would seem rather unlikely, and would, of course, directly contradict what the Bible declares about our omnipotent God.

Second, let's acknowledge that God obviously does not stop all deceivers and all deception, clearly proved by the multitudes of deceivers and deceived people.

And third, let's acknowledge that all deceived people believe they are not deceived. If deceived people knew they are deceived, they wouldn't be deceived. Similarly, deceived people think undeceived people are deceived. That is the nature of deception, and it naturally results in a clash between the deceived and the undeceived.

This leads us to wonder, If all deceived people believe they are not deceived, how then can anyone be sure that he is not deceived, especially in regard to important spiritual and eternal matters?

One of the wonderful things about Christianity is that it is based on divine revelation. It thus provides a basis for one to be sure he is not deceived about God, His will or His plan. When someone defending a religion other than Judaism or Christianity tells me what the founder of his particular religion taught, I like to ask, "How can you be sure that your founder was a true messenger from God who spoke the absolute truth?"

Anyone, of course, can claim that God has spoken to him, and many have. Knowing that, it would seem reasonable to think if God wanted to send all of humanity an important message through a person, He would select a holy person and endorse that holy messenger by means of some very convincing miracles. Then we could be certain we were not being misled by someone whose message was not actually from God. And so it has been. God's major messengers in history have been holy and have been validated by very convincing miracles, Jesus of course being the prime example. What major religion-founding leader in history has a reputation for miracles on a par anywhere remotely close to Jesus? What divinely-endorsing public signs and wonders were performed by Mohammed or Buddha or Confucius? By this single criteria, wise people reject all three as being genuine messengers sent by God.

But are miracles alone a safe criteria for judging whether or not a messenger is endorsed by God? Absolutely not. As I mentioned last month, Jesus warned of this very thing. He spoke of prophets who would work miracles in His name yet who would ultimately be cast into hell because He never knew them (see Matt. 7:15-23). From this we derive three important truths: #1: False spiritual leaders may sometimes work miracles. #2: God's true messengers are always holy. #3: We are very foolish to follow miracle-workers, even those who work their miracles in Jesus' name, unless we are certain that they are living holy lives.

Back to the Original Question

Similar to Jesus' warning regarding wolves in sheep's clothing is God's warning through Moses found in Deuteronomy 13:1-4. There, however, we discover a reason God does not stop all deceivers and deception:

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them, "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him (emphasis added).

A very sobering thought! God may allow a false, unholy messenger to work a miracle in order to test us--to find out what is in our hearts. What a revelation it is of people's hearts when they flock to hear false teachers who, for example, assure them that those who are unholy will one day see God, or that God

wants to bless them so they can lay up more treasures on earth--all in direct contradiction of what Scripture declares (see Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14; Matt. 6:19-20). It seems that perhaps Paul's forewarning to Timothy is being fulfilled:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths (2 Tim. 4:3-4, emphasis added).

The teachers to whom we are drawn reveal our true desires. As Jesus once said in relationship to those who will be drawn to false messiahs in the last days, "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather" (Matt. 24:28). Only unclean birds flock to feast on carrion.

Likewise, only people who have a desire to believe lies are attracted to deceivers. Deception is an election. No one needs to remain deceived. Those who choose to be deceived, however, reveal a heart problem. That is why it is so often fruitless to argue with deceived people with facts and evidence that clearly expose their deception. Their problem is not with head-understanding or logic. Their problem is in their heart. They love darkness, as Jesus said (see John 3:19), so they won't come to the light.

This is not only true for those who have embraced major false religions. It is also just as true for many within Christendom.

The reason "prosperity and success preachers" have such huge followings is because there are so many greedy people--goats who have deceived themselves into thinking they are sheep. They've given Mammon a new name: Jesus Christ. What an amazing deception in light of all the Scripture which directly contradicts what is now so widely embraced! (For a look at some scriptures that thoroughly dismantle this popular deception, see *Through the Needle's Eye*)

The reason many "Cheap Grace" and "God-is-All-Love-and-No-Wrath" churches have grown so large is because there are so many proud people who don't want to repent--people who believe in a God who doesn't actually exist and a gospel that isn't found in the Bible. While they speak ill of those who are devoted to Christ as "unbalanced" or "fanatical" or "holier-than-thou," they claim to be Bible-believing Christians. What they don't realize (because they don't want to) is that they actually hate the Jesus of the Bible, while claiming to love Him.

The reason that some house churches (not all) in North America are so attractive is because uncommitted professing Christians have discovered the least demanding form of Christianity on the planet. They can just hang out together and call it Christianity. Offerings plates are never passed, praise the Lord! No need for pastors either! And how pleasant it is to ignore all that Jesus said about commitment and costly discipleship.

In each of these cases, professing Christians are no less deceived than Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus. Christ has been removed from Christianity. When He is, what is left is "I-anity," the religion of devotion to Me.

Doesn't God Know Everything Already?

Moses' warning about false prophets in Deuteronomy 13:1-4 raises a question. If God knows everything, then why did He say that a false spiritual leader could be a means for Him to "find out" if we love Him with all our hearts?

The simple answer to that question is that God didn't create us as pre-programmed robots. Our choices are exactly that--our choices. Loving God is something we choose to do or choose not to do. God must therefore test us to see what we will choose.

Certainly God foreknows what we will do, but His foreknowledge is based on the outcomes of our tests. If there were no outcomes, there would be nothing for God to foreknow.

Here is an example. If someone tossed a coin one hundred times and I was able to foretell correctly, every time, whether it would land heads or tails, he would be convinced that I could foretell the future. But if he then said, "I'm not going to toss the coin again, but if I did, what would the outcome be?", I would only be able to say, "It would either be heads or tails." The reason is because I can only foresee the future, and there is nothing to foresee in the future regarding the outcome of a coin toss that never occurs.

Similarly, God cannot foreknow events that never occur in the future anymore than He can remember events that never occurred in the past. Thus all free moral agents must be tested in order for God to know (and thus foreknow) what is in their hearts. There are numerous specific instances in Scripture of God testing people that He might find out what is in their hearts. (See Gen. 22:1-12; Ex. 15:25; 16:4; Deut. 8:16; Jug. 2:21-22; 3:1; 2 Chron. 32:31; Ps. 11:4-5; Prov. 17:3; Jer. 17:10; John 6:6; Rev. 3:10.) Some years ago I wrote an entire book on this subject, titled *God's Tests*, which can be read or downloaded online.)

In a nutshell, this is the purpose of life. If you've read the end of your Bible, you know that God has something eternally better in store for people who love Him with all their hearts. This life is just a test. God is testing free moral agents to see who qualifies and who does not qualify for His future eternal kingdom. The only ones who qualify are those who have been transformed by His grace, through faith in a unique person--the Lord Jesus Christ. Those transformed people love Him with all their hearts, and thus they don't follow leaders who don't love Him with all their hearts, as revealed by their fruits.

A Final Important Thought...

We also learn from scriptures such as Deuteronomy 13:1-4 that God does not use some kind of x-ray vision to discern what is in our hearts. He doesn't need to look any deeper than the surface of our skin, because our outward actions reveal our inward state. Jesus said this Himself in different ways:

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 [outward action] from that which fills his heart [inward state] (Luke 6:45).

Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is [outward action], there your heart will be also [inward state] (Luke 12:33-34).

If you love Me [inward state], you will keep My commandments [outward action] (John 14:15).

What comes out of our mouths...what we do with our money...how we obey the Sermon on the Mount...as well as what churches we attend and what spiritual leaders we follow...all reveal the condition of our hearts before God. Moreover, the condition of our hearts determines whether or not we are susceptible to deception, and our susceptibility to deception ultimately determines our eternal destiny. As Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they [and obviously only they] shall see God (Matt. 5:8, emphasis

added).

The refining pot is for silver and furnace for gold, but the Lord tests hearts (Prov. 17:3; emphasis added)

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