

Beware of Being Deceived

by Phil Beach Jr.

Self-deception is a subtle and insidious enemy that can lead us astray from God's truth and will, and we must be vigilant and honest with ourselves to avoid it.

Scripture: Jeremiah 17:9, 1 Corinthians 3:18, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Corinthians 15:33, Galatians 6:3, Galatians 6:7, James 1:22, James 1:26, 1 John 1:8

Topics: "Self Deception", "Spiritual Honesty"

Description

Phil Beach Jr. preaches about the dangers of self-deception, emphasizing the need for honesty and prayerful reflection on our hearts and actions. He highlights the deceitfulness of the human heart, the importance of being doers of God's Word, and the danger of denying our sins or thinking we are wise in our own eyes. Phil Beach Jr. also warns against the deception of thinking we are something when we are nothing, believing we can sow without reaping consequences, or assuming unrighteous actions will not affect our salvation. He concludes by stressing the need to guard against self-deception by living in God's truth and light.

Transcript

Before I begin this study, I want to strongly encourage the reader to take enough time to read it prayerfully and honestly. It may be a very good idea to make this article a family devotion or study with a few trusted friends and allow the Lord to speak to your heart, as a family or group. Perhaps you are blinded to some areas in your life that are in darkness. Getting the honest input of your family and friends will help greatly in this matter. The first step towards being freed from deception is admitting to the possibility and even likelihood that we are deceived in some areas of our lives and need deliverance.

Only those who admit to this and actively seek to be freed by the truth of God's Word will know the joy of being free, indeed! Repeatedly the Word of God warns against being deceived. Both the unconverted as well as those who are converted are in danger of being led astray by many forms of deception. Jesus warned His followers that they were to be guarded against being deceived. Satan is the great deceiver and together with man's fallen nature is the author of all forms of deception.

Many years ago while listening to a radio commentator, the speaker made a profound statement I have never forgotten. He was talking about the many forms of deception in our world today and said that in his opinion the most dangerous form was self-deception. In this writing, I want to look at the specific references to this form of deception. We must ask the Lord to give us deep honesty as we look into His

Word so that He may speak to us and reveal any area in our lives where we are being self-deceived.

Remember, one of the features of self-deception is the presence of darkness that makes us believe we are not deceived. Deception, by nature of its definition, is the condition of being led astray by such trickery and subtlety that the one deceived does not even see it! Let's begin by looking at what God says about our hearts. **THE HEART IS PRONE TOWARD DECEITFULNESS** (Jeremiah 17:9) Jeremiah, under the inspiration of God's Spirit said that the human heart is deceitful above all things and is very wicked, inclined to moral corruption and perversity!

This may not be a popular view of the true moral condition of the human heart, but it is the true view! Man cannot know the depths of deception that lurk within his heart, which therefore cannot be trusted. But God says that He is the one who searches and examines our hearts and is able to lead them to Him, where they can find true rest and help. God promises that He will give those who turn from sin a new heart. This new heart, though it may be filled with God's life and Spirit, is yet prone toward sin and is able to be deceived.

One author has said that even though the heart is renewed by the new birth and the will has turned to God, yet the deep inbred presence of sin still works to lead us astray, and in many forms is yet showing itself in the New Testament, even among those who are children of God. We know that sin has the power to deceive, according to the writer of the book of Hebrews (3:11). Therefore, because of indwelling sin the most devoted believer must remain guarded at all times, because the danger of being deceived lurks within the heart itself!

Only the Sinless one, the Lord Jesus, is free from any form of darkness and deceit and He is our only safety as we abide in Him and walk in the truth of His Word in humility and meekness. So, the question I want to ask is this, "How can we know if we are being self-deceived?" God's Word answers this question in a very clear way. With a prayer to God, let's look at God's Word and let Him speak to us about this imminent danger we all face. **A PERSON IS DECEIVED IF HE IS A HEARER, AND NOT A DOER OF GOD'S WORD** (JAMES 1: 22) Today, there is a great interest among the Lord's people to hear the Word of God.

Many love to attend meetings and listen to interesting preachers or mind stimulating teachers. Still others like to listen to God's Word either by cassette tape or DVD. There is so much listening and hearing of God's Word today but with this comes a great danger. It is possible to fill one's mind with the hearing of God's Word while never being a doer of that Word. Jesus teaches us in the parable of the wise and foolish builders about two kinds of people. One kind is those who listen to God's Word and obey it.

The other kind is those who listen and hear God's Word but never obey. Those who are doers of God's Word are blessed and when the storms of life come to them, God helps them stand. But those who are just hearers of the Word are not blessed. When the storms of life come to them, they will fall. According to this parable, self-deception has gripped our hearts if we are only hearers of God's Word and not doers. Every time we hear God's Word, we must be careful that our hearts receive it very deeply and that our actions change so that we are living in obedience to what we have learned.

If not, we are deceived! Jesus sharply rebuked the religious leaders of His day because they were guilty of this very condition. They were teachers of God's Word, always hearing it, reading it and confessing it, but did not practice it. Many years ago I knew a brother in the Lord who was pastoring a small church. He would always, before He preached anything, encourage his hearers to be sure to pray over the text until it

became a part of their actions. Sometimes, he would tell his congregation, they might have to pray for weeks before they were sure that they were not just hearers of the Word but doers as well.

We need more encouragement like this today, beloved! This is excellent advice for us to follow. A PERSON IS DECEIVED IF HE SAYS HE HAS NO SIN (1 JOHN: 1:8) Whenever we refuse to admit that we have sin, not accepting God's Word that we are all sinners, we are then led astray and become deceived. This form of deception has many forms and masks. Most of us would never confess that we believe we are without sin. But should the Lord bring deep conviction to us and point out a fault in our lives, and we refuse to humble ourselves before Him and others, then we are in fact, claiming innocence from sin and have fallen prey to this form of self-deception.

Many years ago I knew a person who would openly admit, in a "generic" way, to being a sinner. But a time came when the Lord began to humble this man and point out specific sins in his life, those of deep seated pride, love of the praise of man and having a very horrible behavior pattern in the home. When confronted with the Lord's rebuke, this man became very angry, refused to admit to his sin and became offended by the truth. He was in fact claiming to have no sin and was, in his own eyes, guiltless of the charges made against him.

He was deceived because he was claiming to be free from the specific sins that the Lord charged him with. It is easy to make general statements that we are all sinners and all in need of repentance. However, our confession is tested when the Lord rebukes us in a personal way and points out to us our specific sins. He may use His Word or our children or even another brother or sister to rebuke us. How well do we do then, dear ones? Do we humble ourselves before the Lord and our families and friends and admit to our sin, confessing that God is true and we are all liars, or do we resent and reject this kind of rebuke?

What we do will determine if we are guilty of this form of self-deception. I once knew a man who claimed, in a very selfrighteous way, that he was faithful to his wife and never would be untrue to her. He would like to brag about this to many people. One day I approached him and showed him that Jesus said that if a man looks at another woman and lusts after her, in any shape or form, he is guilty of committing adultery with her in his heart. I asked this brother if he had ever, even just one time, been guilty of this sin.

He was speechless and after a few seconds, refused to admit that he had! He was determined to be without sin! How dangerous this form of deception is, dear one. Also, over the years I have met people, both preachers as well as non-preachers who were convinced that they did not need to live a life of daily repentance. One preacher told me that we are not even to mention repentance, once we become Christians. He believed that God no longer sees sin in our lives as Christians and therefore, we must not attempt to repent from sin that does not really exist!

I guess, according to this brother, Paul was in error when he rebuked the believers in the city of Corinth for sinning and failing to repent and Jesus was misguided when He spoke to the churches in Asia Minor and commanded many of them to repent or be judged. A PERSON IS DECEIVED WHEN HE THINKS HIMSELF TO BE SOMETHING WHEN HE IS NOTHING (GAL. 6:3) In context this scripture would refer to a person who feels that he is too important to bear the burdens of others. Like the Pharisees, this kind of person loves to place great burdens upon people but refuses to lift a finger to help bear their struggles.

Such a person thinks that he is superior to others but is in fact nobody, except in his own estimation of himself. We are called to bear each other's burdens. This is basic to the Christian life. Jesus tells us that the most important way that the world will know we are His followers is by seeing the love of God in our

lives. This love will empower us to care for one another and share our lives with each other. There would be no lack in the house of God if everyone was truly filled with God's love and sought to care for each other by sharing all of their resources with those in genuine need.

But, alas, the great form of self-deception: thinking yourself to be something or someone so important and superior to others that you cannot condescend to shoulder another's burden! When teaching his followers about being a servant, Jesus showed them that in the world men of greatness rule over others, telling them what to do and requiring others to serve them. But in the kingdom of God, Jesus said that the great ones will be servants of all. They will be like the Lamb, who was the greatest one who ever lived, and yet came to serve and not to be served.

Jesus said that we would be blessed if we followed his example. There are other ways of falling into this form of self-deception too. When someone has an abundance of this world's goods, lots of money, an important job, and is esteemed by his peers, he begins to believe he is something of worth or significance. If this happens then his heart will begin to get lifted up in pride and he will begin to think that he is some big one and forget that he is nothing at all without God.

The craving for wealth, abundance and more becomes an obsession and the eyes become blinded to the beauty of the Lord Jesus. The presence of contentment with what one has together with godliness is traded for an insatiable lust for an abundance of the things of this life. Because of the indwelling presence of sin, we are all prone to think that we are something when we are really nothing apart from God's Son. God must help us to have a sober estimation of ourselves and to walk in humility before God and man, knowing we are nothing apart from God's favor and life He has freely given to us.

A PERSON IS DECEIVED WHEN HE THINKS HIMSELF WISE WITH THE WISDOM OF THIS AGE (1 COR. 3: 18) God's Word says that a person should not deceive himself. If anyone thinks that he is wise in this age, let him discard his worldly wisdom and discernment and consider himself to be a fool, unwise, and stupid. Let him become a fool so that he may truly become wise. Isaiah says, "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and are prudent and shrewd in their own sight." God says that the wise man should not boast or trust in his wisdom, nor the strong man in his strength.

Instead, they should glory in the Lord who is full of mercy and kindness towards all who turn to Him with a whole heart. By the world's wisdom we cannot know or understand the wisdom of God which is the cross of Christ. Paul said to the Corinthian believers that not many of them were considered to be wise by the standards of this world. Not many of them were influential people, not many of them were mighty and of noble birth. Instead, God deliberately selects those who in the world's estimation are lowborn and insignificant.

God chooses to save those who are branded by the world as poor, even as nothing so that He may bring to nothing those who claim to be wise (by the world's standards). God does this so that no mortal man can have a reason to boast or brag about himself or his wisdom. God says that He is going to destroy the wisdom of the wise man (the one who thinks he is wise.) He will also bring to nothing all the cleverness of the clever ones and frustrate the learning of the learned so that they will no longer be able to trust in their learning and cleverness.

God wants us to glory and boast in His Son alone, who is the source of true wisdom and learning. It is very repulsive in God's eyes to see any of His children think themselves to be wise because of anything they know or have done. When this condition is present, God must deeply humble us so that we are brought

back to our senses and trust only in Him and His Son, as our source of wisdom and knowledge. Paul condemned the Corinthian believers because they had brought the wisdom of this world into the church of God.

They were comparing themselves with each other and allowing favoritism to create division. Additionally they had become proud of their gifts and were bragging about how important each one was. Some of them were so inflated with self-worth and importance they began to think that their gifts were most important in the body and that some of the others' gifts were not even necessary. All this kind of reasoning is rooted in worldly wisdom and amounts to utter foolishness in the eyes of God and if not purged out of our lives will bring untold damage to the Lord's interests.

A PERSON IS DECEIVED WHEN HE SEEMS TO BE RELIGIOUS BUT DOES NOT BRIDLE HIS TONGUE (JAMES 1:26) During my senior year in high school, I attended a church run Christian school that featured the ACE learning program. Subjects were incorporated into small booklets called "PACES". Each PACE had wise sayings on the top of every new chapter. One of those sayings struck me and I never forgot it. It said, "An ounce of action is far better than a ton of talk." James tells us that if our talk does not support our action, then our religion is vanity and we are self-deceived: "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless".

The usage of the word bridle is an interesting one, to say the least. It refers to a man placing a bridle on his own tongue and not another's. This same word is used a few chapters later in the same book and refers to a mature man that is known by his ability to bridle his whole body, the same idea being implied. Much insight can be gleaned by this. Too often we like to focus our attention on the actions and words of others, being our brothers' judge and jury too. But God says that we are to work on watching our own words and be sure that we have placed a bridle on our own tongues.

One's entire religion, which amounts to the external duties of the faith, praying, giving, serving, etc., is in vain if the words of the mouth are not pleasing to the Lord. Should one continue in external religion in such a state, one can be sure that self-deception has begun. God says that we should not permit any kind of foul or polluting words to come out of our mouths. Nor should we allow any kind of unwholesome or worthless chatter to be found in our speech. As God teaches us to bridle our own tongue, we can learn to speak beneficial things to one another, things which are helpful to build one another up in the faith and love of God.

Of course, at times we may have to rebuke each other but even that can be done in a spirit of humility and love so that the effect is good and not one of tearing down the hearer. Each time we say a word that is not pleasant to the Lord we grieve His Spirit and quench His life and love from being expressed in our lives. Being critical in our speech, always finding fault with others and constantly pointing out others' shortcomings are sure signs that we have not placed a bridle on our own tongue.

You can be sure that such a person's religion is vanity to the Lord and his heart is gripped in self-deception! God tells us in His Word that "out of the abundance of the heart [the] mouth speaks". Since true religion springs out of a right heart with God with selfless service towards the needy and helpless, it is only right to see that our words must be pleasing to the Lord if we are to be free from deception. God does not accept outward deeds of religion if there is inward corruption evidenced by an unbridled tongue.

A PERSON IS DECEIVED IF HE THINKS HE CAN SOW AND NOT REAP WHAT HE HAS SOWN (GAL. 6:7) It is very unlikely that a gardener will ever sow cucumber seeds into his garden and reap tomatoes! My wife likes to have a garden and for many years she has sown various kinds of seed. Each year after sowing she always reaps exactly what she has planted. This natural principle is the same in the world of our words and actions. God says in His Word that we must guard against being led astray by believing the dreadful lie that we will not reap exactly what we have sown.

God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows he will also reap. He who sows to the flesh, his lower nature and sensual desires and passions, will from the flesh reap destruction and decay. But whoever sows from the Spirit, those things that come from God and are pleasing to Him, will by the Spirit reap eternal life. God is warning us in this passage of scripture that we must be careful what we are sowing into our children, into our own spiritual lives and into the lives of others.

Every action will reap a harvest! A prayerless heart will be sowing prayerlessness into the lives of everyone we know, especially into our immediate families. Prayerlessness is the work of the flesh, but so many are sowing this into their families' lives and somehow do not believe they will reap a very unpleasant harvest, one day! Others may be sowing a worldly spirit into their family and no doubt will reap exactly that kind of a spirit in their children. Some are very lazy and possess no diligence in their pursuit after the things of Christ.

For years they sow this kind of seed into their wives, into their children and into the fellowship they have with other brothers and sisters in the Lord. Yet many times this does not trouble the conscience much as the pattern goes on for years at a time. Why? Self-deception has set in and the conscience has become numb! Of course this scripture refers to the more obvious works of the flesh too. If a person seeks to obey the desires of the flesh, whether they are immorality, impurity, indecency, anger, strife, bitterness, drunkenness, party spirit, divisions, etc., they will reap the physical and spiritual decay and destruction that such deeds will bring, in the harvest.

Are we sowing in our actions, words or deeds that which is not from the Spirit and have we become calloused to the fact that we will reap a harvest? If the answer is yes, then we are caught in self-deception and must repent and be set free. Remember, everything we do and say is a form of sowing seed and you can be sure that each and every seed we sow, whether good or bad, will bring forth after its kind. One day we will see the effect of every seed we have sown. So, now is the time to repent of sowing from the flesh and beg God to help us sow by His Spirit!

Let us ask the Lord to help us to live lives that are motivated by the fruit of God's Spirit so that all our deeds, words and actions are springing out of God's love, peace, patience, longsuffering, faith, meekness, gentleness and goodness. Such a life will indeed reap for the Lord a pleasant harvest, one that He will enjoy and will be a blessing to those in our lives as well. A PERSON IS DECEIVED IF HE THINKS THE UNRIGHTEOUS WILL INHERIT GOD'S KINGDOM (1 COR. 6:9) Some believe that a person can be saved and go to heaven irrespective of his actions and deeds.

This is a dangerous false doctrine that has led many astray, for the Bible says that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom. Let's see exactly what God says about this. Paul told the Corinthian believers that they were not to be led astray by believing the false doctrine that people who practice sin can go to heaven (please refer to 1 Cor. 6:9-11). He goes on to say that those who are practicing impurity, immorality, and are idolaters will not be saved. Additionally those who participate in adultery, fornication,

homosexuality or any kind of perverse sexual deed will not be saved.

Lastly, Paul says that those who practice cheating, any form of swindling or stealing, greed or grasping for more and more, as well as those who practice drunkenness, reviling others and are foulmouthed and full of deceit and robbery, will not inherit God's kingdom. At one time, dear one, we all were guilty of such sins and were deserving of God's wrath. But in the kindness of God's love we who are saved were washed by the complete atonement of our Lord Jesus and were declared forgiven by His wonderful name.

Now, by God's help, we have the Holy Spirit and we are commanded not to practice such things. John, in his epistle says that a person who is truly righteous before God because of trusting in the atonement of Jesus will do what is right (please refer to 1 John 3:7-10, and many other references in this wonderful book). We cannot separate a standing of being right with God from a life of doing what is right in His eyes. Those who claim to be right with God because they are positionally declared just, but who are yet practicing what is wrong are deceived!

By faith, we are made just in God's eyes and, by faith, we live lives that are free from the control of sin. Yes, we all may sin and fall because of the weakness of the flesh, but we cannot remain in the practice of sin and still claim to be in right standing with God. God will always lead His children to repent and confess their sins so that they can be clean and continue to do what is right in His eyes. If we resist God's Spirit leading us to turn from sin and repent, then we are subject to God's judgment.

We must never believe that a man can be right with God while running with the devil! A man right with God will do what is right and the man that does not do what is right but practices what is wrong is in danger of hell fire! Works do not save us dear one, but they do authenticate whether we are saved or not! A PERSON IS DECEIVED IF HE THINKS THAT CONTACT WITH SIN WILL NOT HARM HIM (1 COR. 15:33) Lastly, we see that a person is deceived if he believes that he can engage in evil companionships, touching what is unclean and yet remain unsoiled.

Evil, worldly, ungodly associations with those with depraved, sinful ways will corrupt good moral character and destroy the good habits and manners one has learned. Over the years I have met countless believers who have been destroyed spiritually because they were deceived into believing that contact with sin and those who practice it would not harm them. They participated in worldly events, listened to ungodly music, watched lewd and licentious programs on TV, were entertained by the children of this world and began to enjoy what God condemns, eventually losing their consciences and becoming involved in the sinful practices of their ungodly associates and friends.

Satan is the master deceiver and he has destroyed countless souls with lies of this sort: "Oh, there is nothing wrong with a little sin, a little fun time from the entertainments of this evil age." This is usually how it starts. But we forget that God says just a speck of leaven will destroy the whole lump. Just a very small amount of impurity, just a small amount of sexual sin, just a small amount of dishonest living, just a small amount of enjoyment of worldly entertainments, just a small amount of fleshly indulging is all it takes to destroy the good character and godly lifestyle a person may possess.

Here is what God says about this. Let's be sure to heed His Word: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers [do not make mismatched alliances with them or come under a different yoke with them, inconsistent with your faith]. For what partnership have right living and right standing with God with iniquity and lawlessness? Or how can light have fellowship with darkness? What harmony can there be between Christ and [the devil]? What agreement [can there be between] a temple of God and idols?" (2 Cor.

6:14-16 Amp.).

God says that we are His temple and that He lives in us by the Holy Spirit. So, we must come out from among the unclean things of this world and not touch them in any shape or form. We are commanded to cleanse ourselves from everything that contaminates spirit and body and to bring our devotion to God to completeness in the fear and godly reverence of God. When the true fear of God lives in our hearts we are taught by God to run from all appearance of evil and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world and its wicked ways and practices!

Make no mistake about it dear one. We will be corrupted and soiled if we allow ourselves to be defiled by ungodly, worldly associations with the corrupt ways of this world. Yes, we must live in the world and work in the world, but remember, we are not of the spirit of this world and must not act as though we were! **SUMMING UP THE DANGERS OF SELF-DECEPTION** Self-deception is most dangerous and we all must remain guarded lest we be led astray. Our hearts are prone to deception, and unless we remain in the Son of God and allow His truth to be our guide, we will be misled.

We can become deceived when we are hearers of God's Word and not doers. Also, we can become deceived when we do not believe that we have sin in our hearts or when we deny that our actions or associations have any effect on our spiritual life. Further deceptions occur when we practice religion and fail to bridle our tongues, or think that being filled with worldly wisdom makes us great in God's eyes. Lastly, we are deceived if we believe that we will not reap exactly what we sow or that we are too important to help others and share in their burdens because we are deluded into thinking we are better than they are and such an act is beneath us.

Jesus said that we are to pray always and not faint. The spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak in all of us. Unless we learn to live a life of prayer, night and day, and allow God's Word to live deeply in our hearts with the intent to obey it, and often encourage one another, we will fall into temptation and undoubtedly become selfdeceived, in either one or many of the ways we have just considered. We must pray that God will give us tender, honest hearts that love and embrace the truth of His Word and flee any form of darkness that its brilliant light may expose! Then and only then can we know the truth and in knowing the truth, we shall indeed be free.

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