Deception - Satan's Chief Weapon, Part 2

Apprehending the Truth

We have seen how easily a believer can be deceived. But what if you have already bought into a lie? You begin to doubt the theology you have learned and come to believe. You suspect something is wrong, that what you are practicing may not be biblical. A trusted friend says or questions something that triggers this feeling. Your antennas go up. Something inside you nags at you. If you are born again, that "something" is probably the Holy Spirit. If you have become trapped in a lie, how do you get free of it? The only antidote to a lie is the truth. The only antidote to deception is the truth. How do you apprehend the truth? Seek, and it will be given to you.

Three Stages of Apprehending Truth.

The first is perceiving truth through understanding. Anyone can learn something by rote, simply memorizing and parroting back information. We all did this at one time or another in school. The trouble is, you don't retain enough of this level of understanding to apply it in life. It is of little value beyond passing the test. I aced my trig exam in college, but today I don't even know what a cosine is, much less how to use it.

The second is the perception of truth for personal application. This is when you understand something well enough to internalize the concept and apply it. You understand *and trust* the knowledge enough to use it. We call this epignosis or faith. Faith is built on knowledge, but taking understanding beyond the rote stage to a point where we can apply what we have learned. We believe it and make value judgments based on it.

> **Example**: You have to *understand* the Cross's provisions to demonstrate *faith* in what Christ did on the Cross.

Third. But there is one more level of perception: the ability to perceive truth for teaching and to pass it on to others. Some believers have a teaching gift, but this principle applies not only to those so gifted *but to all believers*. All of us need to be able to articulate doctrines and support them with Scripture. This is teaching at the witnessing level, where clear, accurate information helps lead someone to Christ. And it is teaching at

the discipling level, where you help a new believer understand the spiritual life and how to use its benefits.

At a minimum, every believer should be able to convey the information needed to lead someone to salvation and then help them understand the mechanics of a fully functioning spiritual life. That is the absolute minimum every believer ought to be able to teach a new believer, and is the absolute minimum a believer needs to understand. Unfortunately, many barely understand the salvation part and have a totally works-based, unbiblical notion of the spiritual life part.

Obviously, the lie can be apprehended, internalized, and taken to the point where we are qualified to teach it just as well as the truth. That means that any knowledge, any communication, must be examined and tested against a standard we know is accurate.

There are three possible attitudes a believer can take toward knowledge presented by another.

We can *assume* what is presented is true and not a lie.

- Some said of Christ that He was a false prophet. This was an assumption. We should never *assume* anything about spiritual matters.

- Since we must never “assume,” then we must “know." But what if we don’t know? What if we are presented with a doctrine and lack the frame of reference to decide reliably about its veracity? The answer is to take the neutral position, “I don’t know.” Some said of Christ, “We don’t know …,” indicating they were not sure He was the Messiah. They thought He might be, but were not certain. “We don’t know…” This is a neutral position given insufficient knowledge. It is safer to take a neutral position when in doubt than to act wrongly. If you are in doubt, take a neutral position concerning it and **test it**! Use the spiritual discernment you have been given from the Word of God, and first determine whether it is true. Do not act in haste. When you don’t know for certain, the best course is to remain neutral until you do.

- Then there is certainty of real knowledge. We have a frame of reference, a foundation, and a high level of trust in the source; it jives

> with what we do know, and we know it is true. Peter said of Christ, "We know…" Peter was certain that Jesus was the Christ. "Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" (Matthew 16:16). Furthermore, Peter came by this knowledge not from man but from God. Jesus replied, "For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (v. 17). Peter had true knowledge. Only when you know—only when you have real knowledge—should you act. And if you have real knowledge, you should not hesitate; you should step out in faith.

We should never assume. When we are not sure, we should take a neutral position until we are certain. Once we are certain, we should step out in faith. This simple rule can protect you from much deception. If you are seeking the truth and want to distinguish it from spiritual deception, God will make the truth known to you, maybe not "right this minute," but He will eventually. In the face of uncertainty, wait for certainty. We should indeed be ready and willing to follow the Lord at any cost–but never recklessly.

Can we find any measure of safety from deception? Yes, I believe we can, but it requires spiritual discernment. It is important to understand that deception is possible. Satan can and will attack you, and he may even succeed.

The Defense?

Our defense is caution, discernment, and a fully functional spiritual relationship with God. But first, we must develop a teaching-level knowledge of God, His plan, His purpose, His essence and character, and His Word. At this level, knowledge places the believer in a position where deception becomes much more difficult, though never impossible.

Understand what God requires of us and how we are to cooperate with Him in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are never called by God to be mindless robots. God requires cooperation with His Spirit and the complete use of every faculty of the whole person for His work. This includes your free will and your intellect, using internalized spiritual truth.

> **Romans 12:2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

The best defense is the truth, but you must learn it and internalize it.

Supernatural Input

If the supernatural excited you before salvation, you've got to love being a believer! The Christian experience is rich in supernatural phenomena, including tongues, healings, miracles, raising the dead, demons, possessions, revelations from God, and, above all, a supernaturally enabled lifestyle. If you were drawn to this sort of thing before salvation, you will continue to be drawn to it afterward. Even if you weren't attracted to it before, the very nature of a believer's Christian experience demands recognition of certain supernatural phenomena. There is no avoiding it.

So, we have a bunch of Christians, some truly saved, some Christian in name only, but just about all of them are, to some extent, expecting supernatural things to happen.

> ***This openness to the supernatural leaves the believer vulnerable to easy deception by Satan.***

This is especially true of new believers who lack the spiritual maturity to discern what is supernatural from God and what is from demons. The point we must always remember is this: If you are seeking the supernatural, *it will be delivered,* if not by God, then certainly by Satan.

> **2 Thessalonians 2:9** The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and **false signs and wonders** (Emphasis added)

If you accept that God can lead a believer, you must also accept that He communicates His wishes to the believer. God communicates with His children in a supernatural manner. That said, some communications are legitimate, and others are not. Some methods of communication are legitimate, and others are not. The "are nots" are communications from evil spirits designed to deceive the believer into disobedience or into a system that will sponsor disobedience. The end result is temporal separation from God, carnality, or what we called in a previous study being "outside our Area of Operations." In other words, it is outside God's will for our lives. "Out there," we are a casualty in the angelic conflict and no longer a witness for God against Satan.

Isaiah 58:11 And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong.

Psalm 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

I believe there are two primary methods of divine leading for the believer.

1. The first is what we call “providential leading." In this way, God brings people, events, and opportunities into our lives that tend to guide us in the direction He wants us to go. The decision always remains ours to follow God’s lead or not.

2. The second method is through the Holy Spirit, in communication with our human spirit. The Holy Spirit suggests directions for us to follow. Some call this “having a burden,” meaning a pressing need to act in a way that may feel unnatural or even well outside our “comfort zone."

Two Examples.
Some thirty+ years ago, several of us decided to start a men’s Bible study. The others suggested I teach it, but I did not feel qualified. The Spirit of God, however, had another opinion and was moving in my heart to encourage me to teach. Still, I tried to avoid a teaching position by buying books we could use for our men’s group we were forming. *Providentially*, God prevented us from acquiring the books for six weeks. The source was unavailable, and then he didn’t return our many calls to place orders; they were out of stock, etc. Finally, I was forced to develop my own lesson plan and teach the classes myself. It worked well enough that soon our wives wanted to join the class. I resisted teaching, but God had His way in the end, working both providentially and in my spirit.

Another example: Janis and I hold very conservative views, and we have held them for years, even before we became believers. In some respects, our views, especially on crime and criminals, would be considered a bit harsh by those with a more liberal perspective. “Lock them up and throw away the key!” God sought to soften our hearts on this subject.

He brought a person into our lives (providential leading) who had no one to turn to but God. His family had abandoned him because he was a three-

time loser in the California penal system, serving life under the three-strikes law. As a new believer, he reached out for help from other believers through a prison ministry called “Someone Cares." Janis heard the ministry’s leader speak on the radio one day and wrote in, asking to be matched with a “pen pal." This was waaaaayyyy outside her comfort zone! But the Spirit of God was moving in her heart and, eventually, in mine to do this.

> **Matthew 25:34** Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, **I was in prison and you came to me.’** (Emphasis added)
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> **Hebrews 10:34** For you had compassion on those in prison…

And Tommy Artist entered our lives to show us that Christians need to be compassionate toward those in prison.

Tommy’s first letters were filled with sadness and desperation. Eventually, they were filled with joy despite his circumstances. For years, I mailed my Bible class notes to Tommy. We corresponded with him several times a month and have thus followed his spiritual development from a babe in Christ to a rapidly maturing believer. We feel like we have known Tommy all our lives, and he was part of our family.

Tommy matured and began leading Bible classes in prison, using the notes I sent. Hardened criminals—Christians—met in the “yard” several times a week. One read the lesson, and the others looked up each verse to be read and discussed.

I believe God had great plans for Tommy and used us to help him get off to a good start. Tommy felt led to work with young, first-time prisoners and lead them to Christ before the older prisoners hardened them. According to Tommy, these prisoners have the best chance of rehabilitation through a relationship with Christ.

You may have noticed I have been using the past tense when speaking about Tommy, because he passed away about 20 years ago. We became

good friends with Tommy and still miss him. But we know we will be reunited with him in eternity.

God moved providentially, softening our hearts toward people in prison. We don't believe the cells should be thrown open and all criminals released, but we do believe we should show compassion to those in prison, especially those who are "in Christ."

God did this because prison offers great opportunities for evangelism. Sometimes a person must be completely humbled and brought to the lowest point before he can see his problem and seek God's help. Tommy was such a person and admitted it freely. God humbled our hearts as well.

I now write to and sometimes visit a prisoner in Angola. He is a new believer who came to Christ after being convicted. Logan has earned his degree from the NOLA Baptist Seminary and ministers to other prisoners. He is in Angola for life, with no hope of parole. That may not be for much longer, as he has a form of leukemia. Logan can use your prayers.

The point is this: God has plans for our lives and work for us to do. If so, He is obliged to reveal those plans to us, lead us where He wants us to go, and enable us to do what He wants us to do in His name. When we are doing His work, we are witnesses against Satan, and Satan will do all he can to prevent it. It follows, then, that Satan will attempt to mimic God's leading by deceiving us into doing something other than what God wants.

Supernatural Input

We established that God communicates with mankind through providential leading and the indwelling Holy Spirit. In ages past, God communicated with mankind in many other ways, including dreams, visions, prophecy, direct revelation, tongues, and burning bushes.

Now pay attention! Aside from Bible study and providential leading, and conviction/illumination by the indwelling Holy Spirit, none of these are valid forms of divine communication today. Why? Because we have the completed canon of Scripture, and God's primary means of communicating with mankind today is through His written Word.

"Well, what about miracles?" you ask. Yes, God does indeed perform miracles, but not through the likes of some televangelist before a TV

audience. When God performs miracles, they carry a message designed to get someone, either the person directly affected by the miracle or a witness to it, to pay attention to God and what He wants of them. In that context, miracles would be considered providential leading.

First Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 address spiritual gifts. The subject of tongues is highly controversial within the Body of Christ. I do not believe tongues are legitimate today, and Scripture supports that.

Speaking in tongues was indeed a form of divine communication in the first century. It served as a warning to Israel of the impending discipline for their continued apostasy and rejection of the Messiah. Tongues ceased before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

> **1 Corinthians 14:21** In the Law it is written, "By people of **strange tongues** and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." [22] Thus **tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers.**…

The passage quotes Isaiah 28:11-12, a warning to Israel of impending disaster.

Israel was committing the "unpardonable sin" of rejecting Messiah and faced divine discipline, which would result in their destruction as a nation in AD 70. Rome administered the discipline, and they spoke "strange tongues," a language foreign to the Israelites.

> **1 Corinthians 13:8** Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as **for tongues, they will cease**; as for knowledge, it will pass away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] **but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.** (Emphasis added)

1 Corinthians 13:10 says that tongues will be removed once the "perfect has come." Some argue that the "perfect" is Christ and that "comes" refers to His Second Coming. Therefore, all these named spiritual gifts would be valid *until* He comes, which is yet future. There are two glaring problems with that:

1. First, Scripture elsewhere states that most of these gifts will be active *during the Kingdom after He comes.* How can they also be done away with *when He comes?*
2. Second, the word "perfect" is in the neuter gender, indicating it is a thing, not a person. The only perfect "thing" is the completed canon of Scripture, and historically that is what happened. After John penned Revelation and completed the Canon of Scripture, and after it had been fully distributed, second-century church fathers rarely spoke in tongues, and most declared that it had long since ceased.

These spiritual gifts served several purposes:

- They were meant to establish the early Church and the authority of the message the apostles delivered.
- They were meant to fill the "void" in Scripture until the New Testament was fully revealed and recorded around 90-95 AD when John penned Revelation.
- Some of these gifts warned Israel of impending discipline, which came in AD 70 with the fall of Jerusalem.

Once this was accomplished and the entire Canon of Scripture had been revealed, recorded, and distributed, these special gifts were no longer necessary.

Do not be looking for signs and wonders. Do not be listening for divine revelations. Do not be looking for God to give you a vision. Do not be waiting for God to reveal something to you in a dream. If you do, these things will be given to you, and they won't likely be from God.

The late J. Vernon McGee once told a story about two students at Moody Bible Institute when he was there, way back when he was a young man before WWII.

> One day, two young seminarians didn't come down for breakfast. Nor did they come down for lunch. And neither did they show up for supper. The dean went to their room to check on them. They were sitting quietly, looking out the window and praying. He asked if something was wrong, if they were sick. They replied that they were fine.
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> "Well, why did you miss three meals?" he asked.

They replied that they were waiting for a sign from God to eat.

"Are you hungry?" he asked.

"Well, yes," they replied.

"Has it occurred to you that might be a sign from God to go eat?"

"No," they replied. "We will wait for a sign from God before we leave here."

"You are leaving here all right," the dean replied. "And I am the one giving the sign. Pack your bags and get out."

If you are looking for "signs and wonders," you are just like the two seminarians and like Israel in the first century, when Jesus said of them,

> **John 4:48** Unless you see signs and wonders you simply will not believe.

Israel was apostate and in the process of rejecting the very thing they longed for, the Kingdom and its King.

The believer's spiritual life is supernatural, all right. It is divinely inspired, divinely led, and divinely enabled. But all of this is accomplished through providential leading and the indwelling Spirit working in man through his human spirit. A true spiritual life does not happen without the inspiration, leading, and enablement of the Spirit of God. There are counterfeits in which man is his own inspiration and attempts to do what he considers divine work through human effort. In the counterfeit, man is glorified. In the true supernatural spiritual life, God is glorified, and Satan is condemned.

Satan will do all he can to distract you from God's work and to get you to do his bidding instead, and he will try to make it look like the work of God. And so many Christians fall for it.

Scripture and Deception

One commonly used area of deception by Satan is in his use of Scripture. In this process, Satan deceives believers and unbelievers with false

interpretations of Scripture. There are two primary areas associated with this form of deception.

One is to distort the doctrine of salvation so that true salvation by grace alone through faith, apart from works, becomes a false system of salvation by works. One example of this is believing one can denounce his salvation and thus forfeit it. The problem with that is Scripture disputes that interpretation.

- **John 3:16** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." If you put your faith *(believe)* in the gospel, you are saved. *You will never perish but* ***have (present tense)*** *eternal life.* If you could renounce your salvation and lose eternal life, then "eternal life" is misnamed.
- Did Jesus lie when he said, "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and **no one is able to snatch** them out of the Father's hand" (**John 10:29**)? But it says **"no one,"** and that would, by definition, include you.
- **Ephesians 2:8** "For by grace **you have been saved** through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast." If anyone born again can renounce or defect from the faith, then salvation is tied to behavior. **That is works.**

Many denominations today teach that salvation is *earned* through some system they define as "righteous." This false doctrine leads the believer to doubt his salvation, damages his witness for God, and discourages unbelievers from ever embracing faith in Christ.

Another system of deception leads the believer into practices that might put off an unbeliever. Perfect examples are those we just considered: dreams, visions, prophecy, direct revelation, tongues, and burning bushes. Some denominations think these are legitimate and active spiritual gifts today; they are not. It is easy for an unbeliever to scoff at such practices, legitimate or not. What better way to damage a believer's witness against Satan than to distract that believer with false doctrines, especially if practicing them damages their witness.

False doctrines usually arise from false teachers misinterpreting Scripture. This leads to false teaching. The antidote is to carefully examine Scripture and compare Scripture with Scripture. When a doctrinal conflict appears with an already established scriptural interpretation, and the doctrine the passage seems to conflict with is well established as truth, assume the interpretation of the study passage is flawed. This can often be traced to word usage and/or translations.

Some examples and solutions:

- Examining the study passage in several translations of the Bible may be helpful.
- Examining the subject's context before and after the passage may help clarify its meaning.
- You might also examine the meanings of the original Hebrew or Greek to better understand how the words in the passage are used.

Some words do not make the “translation trip” to English very accurately, or a word could be used in several ways in translation. A good example is the English word “save” or “saved.” When we encounter that word in the Bible, the default assumption is that it refers to salvation. Sometimes it does, and sometimes it does not, at least not in the sense you might be thinking.

“Save” is said to be used in three tenses:

- Saved—past tense refers to being delivered from the fires of hell.
- Saved—present tense refers to being delivered from daily trials and tribulations.
- Saved—future tense refers to our ultimate sanctification into the presence of God.

In English Bibles, you will see only the words “save” or “saved” in all three cases, but depending on the context, the author's intention could be any of the three interpretations—past, present, or future.

Consider this passage in Matthew, the context of which is the conclusion of the Tribulation. It is often misinterpreted as requiring endurance in one’s faith to the end in order to go to Heaven. That suggests works, but it means nothing of the kind.

Matthew 24:13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

To make matters even more confusing, “saved” appears here in the future tense, as in “will be saved,” because it describes a future event. However, it actually describes a ***present-tense action that will take place in the future*.**

“Endure” is *hupormeno*, meaning to remain or tarry behind. Those believers who *survive* the Tribulation “will be saved.” That word is *suzo*, meaning to save, keep safe and sound, *to rescue from danger or destruction*. They will be rescued! It describes a present-tense action of “saved” (being delivered from daily trials and tribulations) that will occur in the future. These believers who endured (are still alive) at the end of the Tribulation will be rescued to populate the Kingdom.

The passage has nothing to do with losing one’s salvation due to a lack of “endurance” in the faith.

As you can see, word usage isn’t always clear, and Satan will take advantage of that. Again, we must compare translations and interpretations with well-established doctrines and word usage elsewhere in Scripture. Let Scripture help interpret Scripture correctly. Being trapped in false doctrines plays right into Satan’s hands.

The potential for deception is real, and we must remain wary of it. If you aren’t, you become even more vulnerable to Satan’s deception.