

## THE DANGER OF DECEPTION

Message delivered August 1, 2009

As am sure most of you know, Mr. Len Ownby made his way to the free-world last Thursday. He'll be working with the FOCUS team and former Morgan County alumni, Frank Cavender. Please pray for them both.

Last week Len introduced us to a new member of the MCCX congregation, a gentleman by the name of Brandon who comes to us from River Bend. I'm glad to see that Brandon is here again this week, and again we welcome you and the other new guys who have made the service today, and those throughout the week.

I point out Brandon because last week, during the question and answer session, he spoke about those in other countries who are murdered every day for what they believe and he wondered aloud if he would have the faith to give his life for his **LORD**, the way Christ has done for us.

Now that comment struck accord with me as it rang of thoughts I've often had myself – more so in the early days of my calling, but even occasionally now, as I see the world around us quickly speeding toward its predicted end.

I was also privy to another conversation last week, this one by complete accident. The participants were both people I know. The one speaking, a gentleman who has stood behind this wooden box and exposed his understanding of scripture, taken part in several classes up here and for a period of many year, at least as long as I've been at this camp – and according to his own testimony, for much, much longer – he called himself a Christian; a brother; a preacher; a man of God.

Not too long ago, many Christian reference books became available on the compound, and I was told at that time that this professing man of faith had forsaken the Christian Way of life to pursue an eastern philosophy, a religion far removed from the faith of Jesus Christ. I was asked at that time not to say anything, I assume in hopes the man would come to his senses.

The conversation on the yard last week concerned how mad Christians get when the concept of "karma" is explained to them. Now, as I said, the comment wasn't directed toward me, I wasn't even part of the conversation, I just happened to be within earshot. Besides, I've long accepted that "a man reaps what he sows," so I'm not sure how upsetting "karma," or any other false doctrine based on spiritual laws so acutely explained in scripture could possibly upset any true Christian, but arguing about religion is outside of my mandate either way.

What struck me was this former chapel attendee referring to the men he so often strove with about the depth of his conviction and understanding, these men he now referred to as "they" or "them" – "those Christians," the third party to his condemnation.

So we have a contrast: one man contemplating the depths of his conviction, his allegiance, to

the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; another abandoning the true God, the God he thought he knew to pursue another philosophy, a false religion under a different name. It's a contrast I've come across often over the past nine years of my incarceration, sometime in the same person. It's the danger of deception.

When I was first locked up, I too was confused about God, and the multitude of beliefs claiming to be the faith of my fathers threatened to overwhelm me. As God began to draw me, the world hit me with a multitude of ideas and ideologies all claiming the name of Christ – yet teaching far different concepts as to what Christianity means.

At first, I wasn't even aware that commitment was part of the equation. The doctrine of "salvation without works" that I was taught as a child had corrupted my thinking to the point that my god was little more than a philosophical figure ... ready to forgive when the trouble started, but requiring nothing of me as far as repentance, obedience, or faith.

With false religion, whether under the guise of Christianity, Hinduism, Paganism, Rastafarianism, or whatever your poison, the end result is always the same – its death. And you can just as easily find it sitting right here in this chapel, in a supposedly "Christian" service, as you can in religions baring any other name. Scripture tells us, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

The Bible also says, "... it is **impossible** for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, And have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame" (Hebrews 5:4).

Now I don't think my former colleague falls into this classification, simply because I don't believe he knew the truth of God to begin with – but for years he'd all but fight you to prove that he did, and many scholars backup his understanding. So what we need to ask ourselves today is: "How did *I* come to believe what I now do about God, about religion, morality and the entire purpose of human existence?"

You and I were born into a ready-made world, in a professing Christian country. The name of the faith we now claim is widely accepted in this land, and there's little threat of someone picking us for extermination simply because we profess "I am a Christian," at least that's the case today. But does the Christianity we recognize reflect "the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come," or have we blindly accepted one of the religious systems this society takes for granted? Does "the majority rule" apply to faith?

Again and again, the Bible clearly shows that most human beings are deceived. Describing the end-times the Apostle John speaks of the Devil in this manner, he says: "So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, **who deceives the whole world**; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:9).

The “whole world” contains more than two billion professing Christians in major denominations of every configuration and creed and many of them are very sincere in their faith and yet very deceived. Billions of other human beings have lived and died without ever having understood or practiced **any** type of Christianity. And there has never been a time in human history when the majority of the world’s population has professed the Christian faith – and I’m sure most of them were and are sincere in whatever they believe.

So our faith cannot be anchored to what the majority believes, because we’re outnumbered – no matter how you figure the information. And sincerity certainly is no tester of truth, or all religions would be equally valid. Do you believe that the suicide bomber is sincere? I’ll guarantee you that he is!

You need to be able to **prove** what you believe, prove it to yourself – that the One great Creator God is the True God and that the Bible is His inspired revelation to mankind, or else you’ll be deceived too, no matter what you call yourself.

And if you’ve taken to yourself the name of Christ, a Christian, and you have found, as I have – by relationship, by history, by study, by prayer, by the sum total of all your life’s experience – that there is a real God and that the Bible is His inspired revelation to humanity, then you and I must carefully consider what the Bible clearly says about what we are, how we got here, and what we are to become. The Bible itself specifically tells us to “Prove all things, hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew, chapter 7 beginning in verse 21; Mathew 7:21.

A lot of people judge Christians by what they **say** about their religious walk rather than what they actually do. Scripture says “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches...” (Proverbs 22:1), and human nature loves to boast of its accomplishments – but a good name doesn’t come by boasting. The carnal mind scoffs at the instruction of the Proverb, “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips” (27:2), but the natural man persist, after all, who could know better what we’ve accomplished than ourselves? In the end, what we say will have little affect on our final judgement.

Jesus Christ declared in verse 21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, **but he who does the will of My Father** in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

This warning should cause all of us to carefully consider our relationship with God, because many who claim to be followers of Christ, who claim to have done great deeds in His name, will be **rejected** by Him. He will tell them, verse 23, “I never knew you.”

How then can we distinguish the authentic disciples of Jesus Christ, those who are really doing the will of the Father, from those who call Christ their ‘Lord’ but refuse to do God’s Commandments? Jesus warned, in verse 14, that “narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, **and there are few who find it.**”

Should we be surprised? Most people just ignore Jesus’ words when they don’t agree with what

He has to say. That's one difference between philosophy and a loving relationship with your Creator – philosophy is about you, but **love** is about God.

Christ tells those who wish to be His true followers, who wish to have that relationship, in verse 13, that they must “enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, **and there are many who go in by it.**”

Please turn over to 2 Corinthians, chapter 11, and verse 3; 2 Corinthians 11:3. (Pause)

Satan, the arch-deceiver and adversary of all who would be godly, has had almost 2,000 years to counterfeit God's New Testament Church. Even if one becomes a disciple of Christ he is still in danger of being swept back into the clutches of the Devil through deception. Here, in verse 3, the Apostle Paul expressed his concern for those who had been converted under his ministry.

The NIV reads: “But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, **you put up with it** easily enough.”

Paul was amazed that people could so easily turn from his teachings to believe a fraudulent gospel, to embrace a deceptive spirit and even accept a counterfeit conversion and Messiah. Satan is the master deceiver. Far too many people are easy prey, even after they have embraced God's truth. They are enticed by persuasive teachers hawking a counterfeit righteousness.

Paul continues down in verse 13: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Is it any wonder there is such a vast variety of beliefs falsely labeled “Christian” and taught under the name of Jesus Christ? His name often serves as a mask for religious philosophies and doctrines that didn't originate with Him or His apostles. It was true in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and it holds even truer today.

Remember Jesus' warning: “Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:22).

These aren't pagans or Islamist, they are professing Christians, sincerely believing that they're doing God's work, but sincerely deceived. They evidence in their lives the distinguishing mark of both the deceiver and His victims – **sin**.

“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. And you know that [Christ] appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning ...” (1 John 3:4-8a; NASV).

The King James puts it this way, “Sin is transgression of the law,” 1 John 3:4 and in Romans, “... the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Christ made it possible for us to be reconciled to God by grace (Romans 3:24, 25), but it is **the life of Christ** which saves us, not His death. “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved **by His life**” (Romans 5:10).

True Christianity is a Way of life, and that way results from our relationship with the True God – it’s not a philosophy or an academic endeavor. It is based on the doctrine of Christ (2 John 1:9), who lived His life as a model for us to follow. “He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, **even as He walked**” (1 John 2:6).

Paul wrote, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). **That is true Christianity.**

Jesus Christ said, “... I will build my Church,” and on the day of Pentecost in AD 31 His Church was established by a miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The apostles who stood and preached to the diverse ethnic crowd, each of whom heard the words in his own native tongue, these apostles were all men **drafted** into service by Christ.

He told them, “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you (set you apart for a special purpose), that ye should go and bring forth fruit...” (John 15:16). The book of Acts says, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47b).

Please back up a book to 1 Corinthians, chapter 2 and verse 11.1 Corinthians 2:11. It’s going to take me a minute to get there, so please bear with me.

Christ promised to be with His Church, and that Church is alive and well today. But it’s not a religious conference or a political, or even physical, organization – it is a **spiritual organism** made up of sometimes scattered individuals who God has begotten “with the word of truth.” (James 1:18) through the Power of His Spirit.

The apostles of Christ didn’t decide to form a corporation. They didn’t hold a conference and file documents with the Roman government, or apply to the Sanhedrin for permission to form a “church.” They didn’t draft by-laws, adopt a constitution, or draw up organizational charts. But by the receiving of God’s Holy Spirit, God the Father **begot** each of them as His sons.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant

mercy hath **begotten us again** unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

You cannot join God’s true Church, **He must put you into it** by His Spirit. Christ said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: No man cometh unto the Father but by Me” (John 14:6). There are not many routes to salvation, **only one**. It’s Christ in you through the Spirit of God and you in the body of Christ.

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14), “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ...” (verses 16, 17a).

We’re further told that those who have received the Spirit of God, must be striving to do what Christ did – to overcome the wickedness of this world. “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21).

Paul says in Romans, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

And John ask, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” He goes on to say in the next verse, “.. it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because **the Spirit is truth**” (1 John 5:5-6)

And finally, 1 Corinthians 2:11: “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, **not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth**; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:11-14).

As we’ve seen today, some who profess Christianity are intentionally deceitful, turning the grace of God into a license to sin. Others sincerely believe they are doing the work of God and simply cannot tell the difference.

Neither the amount of people that subscribe to a doctrine, nor the sincerity of its followers have any bearing on its validity. In fact, the opposite is true. Jesus called his followers a “little flock,” He said they would be “few” and generally rejected by the world.

only true tester of reality, the Word of God in its entirety.

**“All** Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16). Nothing and no one else will do.

You see, man-made religion is about authority. So whatever authority one man or group of people or denomination gives to any individual, its all for not. No PHD, Theological degree or seminary training is going to give you any clout with God or His true followers. Christ is not divided, nor deceived.

However, “.. there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4).

A group went out from John’s congregations. He said, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us: but they went out, **that they might be manifest** that they were not all of us.”

They had to leave before people even knew they were not of the Church. Paul told Timothy, “... evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13).

Peter said, “... many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the **way of truth** shall be evil spoken of’ (2 Peter 2:2).

Professing Christianity has taken several hits in the media the last few decades as seemingly upstanding servants of God have been caught doing everything from embezzling money to sexual perversions too great and numerous to describe.

Jesus warned of these men, he said, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by there fruits” (Matthew 7:15).

Don’t be fooled by a man’s clothing, by the mask he wears. Don’t be fooled by his good deeds, or the elevation of his office. Satan doesn’t come to us as the adversary, he comes as a friend, as a minister of righteousness, as an angel of light.

When he sows discord among brethren (Proverb 6:19), he’ll tell you he’s just looking out for you. When he leads you into disobedience, he’ll say its so you won’t suffer under God’s heavy hand. But when he excuses your sin, what he won’t tell you is that it’s to justify his own.

The guys up here “playing church” are of little threat. Anyone who takes the Scriptures remotely serious can spot the posers a mile away. It’s the ones who gamer respect, the ones we look-up to that can cause the real damage.

Jesus told the religious leaders of His day, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly **appear righteous unto men**, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matthew 23:27-28).

He told them they would “compass sea and land to make one proselyte (one convert), and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Matthew 23:15).

Be not deceived: evil (companionships **[alt. trans.]**) corrupt good (character [MP])” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

“... Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers (slanderers [MP]), nor extortioners, shall enter the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

Don’t be deceived!