

The Deception of God's People

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During World War II, the Allies, amassed in England, were preparing for the invasion of Europe. We commonly know that today as D-Day. This was going to be the largest invasion in the history of mankind (and still is to this day). Nothing has surpassed it. The planners of this whole operation—this massive invasion—calculated that if the Germans were to know the location of the invasion forty-eight hours in advance, the invasion would be doomed, because they could get enough resources to the landing site to repulse it, so it was critical that it remain a secret. Beginning the summer before, in 1943, the Allies perpetrated a great deception upon Germany. It's a fact of history and not well known, but they went to great lengths to confuse the leadership of Germany as to when the invasion would occur and where it would begin.

So they created a fake army. They broadcast fake radio communications—communications about troop movements and supply movements, and all the kinds of things you would do if you were planning an invasion, and the army was totally fake. They created airplanes and trucks out of wood and canvas so that from the air they appeared real. They also developed inflatable Sherman tanks that could be put in one place and then moved the next day to a different place, making it look as though the Allies had many more airplanes, trucks and tanks than they did, and these props were part of this fake army. They even went so far as to have men push big rollers that simulated tire tracks, as if a big troop carrier had gone through. They pushed these rollers over muddy fields, multiple times, so that the German aerial reconnaissance would look down and see all the tracks and think something real was going on below, when it was all a great deception.

General Patton, whom the Germans regarded as our most brilliant general, had gotten in trouble for slapping a soldier—a well-known account in American military history—and he was in disfavor with General (“Ike”) Eisenhower, so Ike assigned him to be the commander of this fake army, which Patton just hated. But he cooperated with the ruse and appeared in various places and at different times, indicating that he was indeed the general of this army. The whole goal was to convince Germany that the invasion would occur at the closest point from England to France, the Pas-de-Calais on the French coast, the most logical invasion point because it was the closest. However, the invasion—the real invasion—was to be at Normandy, 130 miles to the southwest. The great deception worked. The Germans were caught off guard and the invasion was a success. So here the whole high command of Germany, including Hitler himself, was deceived by all of this elaborate planning.

The question for us, as we approach Passover, is can we be deceived? The whole high command of Germany was deceived by a humanly devised ruse. Can we be deceived by someone far more powerful than the commanders of the Allies? Let's go to Jeremiah

chapter 17 and verse 9. This was one of the first memory scriptures I learned when I came into the church in the mid '60s, a verse I think most of us know by heart. We're told something very fundamental as far as human nature goes.

Jeremiah 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all [the word things is in italics in my King James] ... and [in addition to that] desperately wicked: who can know it? 10) I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. (KJV)*

Reaping what we sow. It's interesting, the word *deceitful* in the Hebrew means crooked or polluted. It comes from a root word that has an interesting definition. The root word means to seize by the heel, as if tripping or restraining somebody by holding the heel, meaning to keep them from doing what is right and what is honorable. So deceit is something crooked and polluted that can keep us from doing what God wants us to do. The New Oxford American Dictionary defines it thus: *To cause someone to believe something that is not true.* That's a good definition, to cause someone to believe something that is not true. So, looking at Jeremiah 17:9, God is telling us that our hearts, our innermost beings, can believe something that is untrue and even wicked. The heart tends in that direction if it's not offset by God's Holy Spirit. Here's the great danger about deception. Those who are deceived don't know they are deceived because they are deceived. That's the very definition of deception. People who are deceived don't know it because they are deceived. So today we're going to investigate this notion of deception. The title of the sermon is:

The Deception of God's People

We're going to see that God's people have been deceived from day one. It is possible and it has happened. For the first point, let's ask the question:

1. When did the deception begin and who was its author?

It doesn't take a genius to figure that out so let's go to the first book of the Bible, Genesis 3, verse 1. Right at the very beginning, we're going to see that the deception has begun.

Genesis 3:1 *Now the serpent was more subtle ... (KJV)*

If you look at the Hebrew word for *subtle* it means cunning or crafty in a bad sense. So this serpent was very cunning and very crafty. Very brilliant in a bad way.

1 repeated) ... *the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. [Obviously we know Satan is a created being; Satan is not eternal.] And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*

2) *And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:*

3) *But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.*

4) *And the serpent said unto the woman [now the deception begins with an outright lie], Ye shall not surely die: (KJV)*

What God is telling you is not true, you're not going to die.

5) *For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods ... (KJV)*

God doesn't want that to happen to you, He wants to keep you as a slave, or whatever Satan said at the time. He said, you're going to be as God, you're going to know good and evil (so that filled up their vanity quotient for the day).

6) *And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise [appealing to our pride and vanity], she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

7) *And the eyes of them both were opened ... (KJV)*

We know the rest of that story. Now with that in mind, let's go to the last book of the Bible, Revelation 12, and let's ask, did the deception just disappear? Did it go away or is it still present? Revelation 12:9, a very familiar scripture.

Revelation 12:9 *And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent [the same serpent as in Genesis 3], called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world:*

He has gone from deceiving Adam and Eve in Genesis to deceiving the entire world in Revelation. And we see here,

9 continued) *... he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (KJV)*

Back in verse 3, it tells us this being deceived a third of the angels—spirit beings—deceived a third of them. So we see here very quickly from the first book of the Bible to the last book of the Bible, this great deceiver has been at work the whole time and has had success in deceiving human beings as well as spirit beings.

Let's go to John 8, and we'll begin in verse 42. Christ is talking to the Jews there present. He was not sparing them and was telling them what they were like and who their Father was. This obviously did not set well.

John 8:42 *Jesus said unto them [the Jews present], If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; (KJV)*

Can you imagine this man standing there, telling them, I came from God. That just set their teeth on edge.

42 continued) ... neither came I of myself, but he [God] sent me.

They were upset with that.

43) *Why do ye not understand my speech? [What's the problem with you all?] even because [and He gives the answer] ye cannot hear my word. (KJV)*

The reason they couldn't hear His word was because the Jewish hierarchy was deceived by Satan, who was working in advance, so that when Christ's time to preach and to interact with the hierarchy came, Satan had already poisoned that well through deception.

44) *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, [Satan didn't want to stay in the truth] because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (KJV)*

As we saw with Adam and Eve, Satan lies in order to deceive. He uses a lie to deceive God's people. With that in mind, let's go to 2 Corinthians 4 and we're going to read verse 4, just one verse. This tells us that not only does Satan deceive, he does something else and we have all experienced this personally, sometimes in our own life, certainly in the lives of others. This tells us about Satan. Remember we just read in Revelation that Satan has deceived the entire world.

2 Corinthians 4:4 [Paul says] *In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (KJV)*

We see—we know—that Satan blinded the minds of the Jewish hierarchy, of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Scribes; he blinded them in order to deceive them. Satan can blind only so far as God allows. God is in control of the whole situation but God allows a certain blindness to occur, and certainly did among the Jews of Christ's day. Then let's go to Ephesians 2; we'll read verse 2 and the first part of verse 3. I'm going to read this out of the New Living Translation [an older, online version]. It says it well. Paul is telling the Ephesians, and by extension, us, today,

Ephesians 2:2 *You used to live just like the rest of the world [yes, we did] full of sin, [notice this] obeying Satan. (NLT)*

When we sin, we obey Satan.

2 continued) ... *The mighty prince of the power of the air. [Notice this] He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. (NLT)*

3) *All of us used to live that way, following the passions and desires of our evil nature. We were born with an evil nature. (NLT)*

We see here that Satan is a spirit who works. The fact is, being a spirit being, Satan takes no time off. He doesn't take holidays or vacations, he doesn't need sleep, he works continually to deceive the hearts, especially of God's people. We need to remember that more than anything else, Satan's goal is to deceive the whole world, but he really wants to deceive God's people, more than any other group. Because those are the ones whom God is calling, those are the ones for whom He has a plan, and Satan hates that plan and wants to deceive those whom God has called. He wants to deceive God's children.

Let's go to John 10. We've talked about this before; this is the parable of the sheepfold, but let's approach it from the standpoint of Satan's motivation today. What does he want to do? What is his prime goal? Christ is using the analogy of the sheepfold to prepare the disciples and later the apostles for what lies ahead and for how Satan works. A sheepfold in those days was basically made out of piled rocks. If you looked at a cross-section of it, it was a trapezoid, with slanted sides, a flat top and a gate at one end. It was built in such a way that sheep couldn't climb up and intruders were kept out.

John 10:1 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. (KJV)*

Because he's trying to sneak in.

2) *But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. (KJV)*

He has the key to the door, he has access to the door, he doesn't need to climb up the rock wall.

3) *To him the porter [the gatekeeper] openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name [that means the shepherd cares about the sheep enough to know each one individually], and leadeth them out.*

4) *And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. (KJV)*

They recognize him.

5) *And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.*

6) *This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.*

7) [He begins to explain] *Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. (KJV)*

Meaning if you're going to get in, you have to go through Me, the door.

8) *All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers:*

In other words, those thieves and robbers were deceived by Satan to do harm to those whom God has called.

8 continued) ... *but the sheep did not hear them.*

9) *I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.*

Meaning green grass and pure water—to be fed, protected and taken care of. Here is the key:

10) *The thief [that's Satan] cometh not, but for to steal [us away from God], and to kill [physically], and to destroy [spiritually]:*

We've had a number of God's people have very close calls with death. I know Mark [Mickelson] has had a couple of them in the last couple of years; so have others. If God didn't protect us, we'd all be dead anyway, but Satan wants to come to steal, to kill and to destroy. But Christ says of His purpose,

10 continued) ... *I am come [for a totally different reason] that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (KJV)*

What a contrast between Satan and Christ. Christ wants to give to His people, Satan wants to kill them all and cause them to suffer. So we see here in this first point that Satan is the author and the promoter of deception. His goal is to turn us from God through deception, just as he did Adam and Eve. He works on it every day of our lives. He wants to deceive us to the point that we will deny God—that we will walk away from God, deny who He is, deny His supremacy, deny His authority, deny His power and deny His Son, Jesus Christ. We don't want to come close to that. That leads to the second point:

2. We can be deceived doctrinally.

That's happened to God's people and it continues to this day. Let's turn to 2 John, verse 7. John lived longer than any apostle, as we know, and he wrote later, obviously, than any other apostle. Notice what he said toward the end of the first century A.D.

2 John 1:7 *For many deceivers are entered into the world ... (KJV)*

Who is the author of deception? These are people who are provoked by Satan,

7 continued) ... *who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.*

In John's time this was a prime deception.

7 continued) ... *This is a deceiver and an antichrist.* (KJV)

In this particular case, John was referring to the Gnostics; this movement was sweeping the Middle East and they denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. John was countering this. Notice his solution in verse 8. How do we solve this deception?

8) *Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought [or worked for], but that we receive a full reward.* (KJV)

We know that Paul told us, in 2 Corinthians 13:5, that we ought to examine ourselves (we won't turn there). This is a good time, we should do it all the time, and as Passover approaches, we must pay attention to what John says and what Paul said—look to yourselves, examine yourselves to see if you're in the faith—to see if maybe we've been deceived, because we always have to be on guard against that.

9) *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.* (KJV)

Why would John say that? Because Christ spoke only what His Father told Him to speak. Let's go to John 12:49. Christ was not some loose canon, come to establish His own thing. Christ came to do the will of His Father—perfect unity, perfect harmony, and He is the perfect Servant of His Father. It couldn't be more plain. Christ says,

John 12:49 *For I have not spoken of myself [I'm not making this up, not something new for Me]; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.* (KJV)

Very clear.

50) *And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.* (KJV)

No more, no less. Christ was under the authority of His Father; He was the Servant of His Father; He was the Word on this earth who spoke what His Father told Him to speak. In 2 John 1:9, that's what John meant when he said if you abide in Christ, you abide in the Father because They have the same nature and character, and God told Christ what to speak.

Let's look at the doctrinal deception of the Scribes and the Pharisees. It was amazing how deceived they were. Let's go to Mathew 15, verse 3. To get to the point where they were—we're going to read about where they were—you have to really be deceived. It doesn't come overnight; Satan just nibbles away and deceives people bit by bit, until they are way, way off track. I will read this out of the New Living Translation.

Matthew 15:3 *Jesus replied ... (NLT)*

He's replying to the Scribes and the Pharisees, and He doesn't pull any punches.

3 continued) *"And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God?"* [How can you do this, He's asking.]

4) [He gives an example] *For instance, God says, 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Anyone who speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death.'* [Strong words.]

5) *But you* [you Scribes and Pharisees] *say you don't need to honor your parents by caring for their needs if you give the money to God instead.* (NLT)

So the leaders of the Temple were going to someone who was wealthy, who had some money, which he was using to honor and care for his elderly father and mother, and they were telling him, no, you don't need to do that; it's more important that you give the money to God—meaning the coffers of the Temple. So these priests who were deceived convinced others not to support their parents, as the commandment clearly states, but rather to give that same money to the Temple. Christ nailed them on this.

6) *So by your own tradition, you nullify the direct commandment of God.*

7) *You hypocrites! Isaiah was prophesying about you when he said* [now He's quoting Isaiah],

8) *'These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far away.*

9) *Their worship is a farce for they replace God's commandments with their own man-made teachings.'* (NLT)

That's how far the Pharisees and Sadducees, the leaders of the religious life of the Jews, had gone astray. They were deceived into violating the direct commandments of God and they felt they were justified in doing so. That shows you how deep deception can be. Because of their actions, Christ said they were of their father the devil. Just read it in John 8:44—it is a condemnation. The very same thing is happening today when people put tradition in front of truth. Well, this is what we've always believed, this is what I was taught. Okay, but is it truth?

If it's truth, obey it, but if it's not truth—if you read one thing in the Bible and then open up a booklet or somebody tells you something that contradicts what's in the Bible, just as Christ was pointing out to the Sadducees and Pharisees—what are we going to do? Are we going to believe the booklet or what comes out of some man's mouth, or are we going to believe what God says. Our choice—their choice. It's happening today—why?—because Satan is still in the business of deceiving God's people. Doctrine must be based on God's word, not on tradition and not on what men say about God's word. It's amazing how with many people today—and we have friends in other groups—their Bible study consists of reading a booklet about what the author says about the Bible but they don't really read the Bible for what the Bible says. That's kind of a scary thought. Satan wants us to follow men because if we follow a man, he can get to the man and deceive the man. If our focus is on God's word then we just read God's word directly

from the book and there's no chance of being deceived, if we adhere to the book—God's words. That leads us to the third point. (The second was we can be deceived doctrinally, and certainly the Jews of Christ's day were.) The third point is:

3. Satan can deceive us into breaking God's commandments.

We saw an example of that just a minute ago but let's see some more examples. We can be deceived into directly breaking God's commandments. Let's go to Luke 6:6. This is another example of how not paying attention to God's word can cause you to drift far, over time, if you put the traditions of the elders first—in this case, ahead of God's word.

Luke 6:6 *And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered.
7) And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him. (KJV)*

Oh, we can't heal on the Sabbath day—that's violating the Sabbath! Well, who said so?

8) *But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst [in the middle of everybody gathered around]. And he arose and stood forth.*

9) [Christ is setting the stage here—brilliant] *Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it? [You tell me!]*

10) *And looking round about upon them all, [the Scribes and the Pharisees wouldn't dare say a word, of course] he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other. (KJV)*

Now instead of praising God, notice what the hierarchy did in verse 11.

11) *And they were filled with madness [the King James says];*

The Greek means rage; they weren't praising God, they were angry because somebody just kicked them off the stage. Somebody is now performing a miracle and doing good and they don't get any credit for it. Somebody is surpassing them in the eyes of the people. They were filled with rage.

11 continued) *... and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus. (KJV)*

Guess what they were talking about—how can we kill Him? How can we stop this by taking His life? What can we do? The Scribes and the Pharisees were so deceived by that point in time they thought healing on the Sabbath was a sin. Can you imagine? Here God says to honor the Sabbath day and we're worshipping God on the Sabbath day, and Christ heals a man in God's name on the Sabbath day, and we can't have that. How far the deception goes. Let's notice how deep it can be; let's go to John 16:2. This

is a prophecy and it happened in the apostles' day and we're going to see it happening today. As Solomon said, there's nothing new under the sun.

John 16:2 *They [meaning the religious hierarchy] shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. (KJV)*

How off track can you be to think that if you kill Christ, if you kill one of God's children, one of the apostles of Christ, you're doing God a service? How crooked, how twisted can you be?

3) And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. (KJV)

They have not known God. They wound up doing it to Christ. They did it, as far as we know, to all of the apostles, whose lives ended in violent death, except John. Tradition has it that Isaiah was sawn in two—can you imagine? This is Satan's influence on the minds of people to the point that they think that they're doing God a service by committing murder, despite what the commandments say of course. Today, we are a little more sophisticated. We don't actually take people out and burn them at a stake or stone them to death, but murder happens. You can murder somebody's character, somebody's reputation, through slander, through lies and deceit, and that's happening today among God's people. Particularly with anybody who happens to stand up for the truth when the hierarchy or the traditionalists say, we can't have that, and so what do they do? They try to murder the person's reputation. You can't argue scripture, that's impossible, but they can try to assassinate the character of somebody who speaks the truth. Let's go to 3 John 1:11. Christ said that the people who do this do not know God, do not know Me. John is writing toward the end of his life and much has happened since Christ's death.

3 John 1:11 *Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good [very clear, very plain]. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil [notice this] hath not seen God. (KJV)*

Interesting. This is precisely what Christ meant when He confronted the Jews in John 5:37. We won't turn there, but He said, you have neither heard God's voice at any time nor seen Him. This is what Christ was talking about. If you do evil, you don't know God. You don't understand God, therefore you've never seen God, you've never heard God, because you are so far away from God. We can be deceived into breaking the very commandments of God; that is a scary thought and is something about which all of us, as we look to the Passover, need to examine ourselves to make sure that Satan hasn't got a foothold and He isn't grinding on us to take us astray.

That leads to the fourth point, and this is probably the most important concept. It's the most frightening, at least to me.

4. We are capable of deceiving ourselves.

It's no wonder that we're capable of deceiving ourselves because the author of deception deceived himself. We won't turn there but in Isaiah 14:14, what did Satan say? I will make myself like the Most High. What a deception—what a self-deception! Satan thinks he can rival God? He has the power equal to God or exceeding God that he can kick God off His throne? He thought he could turn Jesus Christ; remember when Christ fasted forty days and forty nights?—you worship me and I'm going to give you all of this stuff. He was deceiving himself from the very beginning, thinking, I know better than God and if I were running things, I could do it better than God—of course, in his evil, perverted, twisted way. The fact is, from the very beginning, Satan was self-deceived. So if Satan can be self-deceived, a human being can be self-deceived. Let's look at James 1:26. It seems like in the church, there's always a problem with people who gossip and slander, and talk and say the wrong things, and offend people and stir up controversy. As Solomon said, nothing new under the sun. It was happening then, it's happened down through the centuries.

James 1:26 *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. (KJV)*

The New International Version says this:

James 1:26 *If anyone considers himself religious, and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. (NIV)*

The subject here is keeping a rein on the tongue—controlling the mouth. James is telling us very clearly that if you can't control your mouth and yet at the same time think you're religious, you're just a babbler. You're just talking in vain because your religion is in vain. You're not practicing what God says. This principle can apply to any sin. Not just the tongue, not just what we've talked about. The danger is that we can't repent of a sin that we have never admitted we have.

So if Satan deceives us into thinking that we haven't sinned in this area, then how can we repent? Satan wants us to believe that we have no sin in a certain area, when we actually do, and then if that sin is not repented of there is a penalty for sin, and that penalty is death. If we are blind or deceived into thinking, I've never done that or I don't do that, or we just ignore it and trample all over people with our mouth, as James has described, or in other ways, then how can we repent of a sin that we do not acknowledge we have?

If Satan can deceive us and get us in that position, then he's got us. Let's go to Matthew 7:3. Christ is speaking to the disciples. This is His first recorded sermon and He hits it right on the head. He doesn't wait to bring up this concept down the road, He brings it up right in the beginning. I'm going to read this out of the New King James. Christ speaking to the disciples; we've heard this before, we know it by heart:

Matthew 7:3 *And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?*

4) *Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me remove the speck from your eye"; and look, a plank is in your own eye? (KJV)*

The plank is sticking out so far that you can't even get to your brother—it's in the way.

5) [Notice what Christ says] *Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (KJV)*

The fact is, it's so easy to see somebody else's sins. It's so easy. We see other people and say, they did that; look at that—they shouldn't be doing that. Our human nature coupled with Satan's deception blocks us from seeing ourselves. I am ashamed of some of the times I haven't seen myself. What I've said, what I've done over the years and thought to myself, you were doing okay, but you look back on it now and think, how deceived I was, and I deceived myself. Some in the Corinthian church deceived themselves. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 12:19. I'll read this out of the New Living Translation. There were quite a few, apparently, in the Corinthian church, who were absolutely deceived in thinking they could warm a seat in God's church and behave the way they were behaving. Paul is not pulling any punches.

2 Corinthians 12:19 *Perhaps you think we are saying all this just to defend ourselves. That isn't it at all. We tell you this as Christ's servants [and here is the scary thought] and we know that God is listening. (NLT)*

God hears every word we say, He knows every thought in our mind, and yet sometimes we think we can hide something from God or do something that God doesn't see. We know that God is listening, and then Paul says, notice this,

19 continued) ... *Everything we do [meaning as a true minister of God], dear friends, is for your benefit. (NLT)*

Everything God does is for our benefit and with every true minister, everything that he does should be for the benefit of the brethren.

20) *For I am afraid that when I come to visit you, I won't like what I find, and then you won't like my response. I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfishness, backstabbing, gossip, conceit, and disorderly behavior. (NLT)*

A church filled with this—can you imagine? I think we've all been in churches that were full of this and some of us wanted to flee.

21) *Yes, I am afraid that when I come, God will humble me again because of you. And I will have to grieve because [notice this] many of you who sinned earlier*

have not repented of your impurity, sexual immorality, and eagerness for lustful pleasure. (NLT)

Paul warned them when he visited previously, when he wrote them previously, there had been no change. They were deceiving themselves into thinking, I can do this and remain in good standing with God. What a deception. Chapter 13, verse 1.

2 Corinthians 13:1 *This is the third time I am coming to visit you (and as the Scriptures say, "The facts of every case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses"). [Paul is quoting Numbers 35:30.]*

2) I have already warned those who had been sinning when I was there on my second visit. Now I again warn them and all others, just as I did before, that this next time I will not spare them. (NLT)

You've been warned, you've been told, so you're not going to be welcome in God's church if you keep doing this. Satan apparently deceived them into thinking they had no sin or that God would give them a pass. The same thing happened to David; let's go to 2 Samuel 11. Jack [Elder] covered this account the week before last so I'm just going to summarize it very briefly. This is the start of it. This obviously is the account of David and Bathsheba and the aftermath of his actions.

2 Samuel 11:27 *And when the mourning [for Uriah] was past, David sent and fetched her [meaning Bathsheba] to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD. (KJV)*

The child was born, so this is nine months, a year later, and God gave David time to come to himself and David hadn't, so in chapter 12, verse 1, it says:

2 Samuel 12:1 *And the LORD [God Almighty] sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.*

2) The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: (KJV)

And the poor man had nothing except a little lamb and this little lamb was like a pet. The lamb lived in the house, ate off the table, slept with the children, just like a member of the family. Like people today have dogs or cats in a similar way. Then Nathan told David a traveler came to the city to visit the rich man, and this rich man, despite having many flocks of lambs, would not take one of his own but took the lamb of the poor man, (indicating the poor man worked for the rich man). So he just went in and took that lamb and he killed it, dressed it, cooked it and ate it. When David heard that he just exploded. He said, that man needs to die. Then comes those very famous words from Nathan. He said, you are the man. You've killed Uriah and you've taken his wife to be your wife. Notice verse 9. David was deceived into despising the commandment of God. This man who was after God's own heart was deceived to the point that he thought he could despise God's commandments and get away with it. He thought he could do that. Now, to David's credit, what was his reaction? Verse 13.

13) *And David said unto Nathan, [he didn't back down, he didn't justify, he didn't minimize it] I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. (KJV)*

We won't turn there but we know in Psalm 51:3, David said, I acknowledge my transgressions and my sins are ever before me. I am sure from that day forth, he would have flashbacks to his involvement in the killing of Uriah, the lies, the deceit and the adultery. It haunted him the rest of his life. But thankfully, David's self-deception and spiritual blindness were overcome and we know he repented. The same thing has happened in God's church and some people have witnessed it directly. (Hopefully most people haven't.) There was a high-ranking minister back in the 1960s and '70s who said, God winks at my sins because of what I do for the work. This man was a serial adulterer, and wouldn't stop, thinking, God just winks at it because I'm so important because of what I do for Him. What he was really saying was, God can't get along without me, therefore, He must wink at my sins. Let's go to Galatians 6:3, lest any of us think that we're in such a category, because we're not. See, that's how far deception can go. When somebody thinks that they're so important that they can get away with sin, and violate the direct commandments of God because of who they are and what they are, that is deception.

Galatians 6:3 *For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. (KJV)*

Self-deception. We are told in the Bible that God can raise up stones to replace any of us, so who are we? It doesn't make any difference if you are a minister or not. God doesn't need any of us. He doesn't have to have any of us. He gives us opportunities, He gives us chances to serve and to give, and to follow in Christ's footsteps, but if we walk away, God will raise up stones to replace us. We see that right in front of our eyes. God raises up people to come and replace those who turn their backs on Him. It would be easier for all of us, David included, if we could see ourselves as God sees us and not through our rose-colored glasses. God sees reality, and a frequent prayer of mine is, God, show me the reality of me, not as I think I am but as You know I am. Show me so I can make the changes that I need to make so I can be more like Jesus Christ when He walked this earth. But our human nature—and Satan is right there—will deceive us into putting ourselves in the best light, ignoring our sins, ignoring our faults, ignoring our shortcomings, and therefore if we don't acknowledge our sins and can't repent, we have a problem.

This is a very important concept as Passover approaches. We have to see ourselves as God sees us, not as we would like to see ourselves. As I said, I am ashamed that in the past I was so blind to some of my sins, to some of my behavior. I caused great pain to various people over the years because I was self-deceived, and thought it was okay to behave this way, to follow the examples of other ministers, that it's okay to behave this way and it's not. It took me thirty years to figure it out, slow learner that I am, but there is a different way and Christ set us the example. We have to remember at this time of year, sins not repented of bring death. If Satan can deceive us into believing we

have no sin, or we deceive ourselves into believing we have no sin, Satan has a part in our ultimate destruction and we don't want to go there. The last point:

5. Satan's great deception is going on now and will increase in the future.

Let's go to 2 Corinthians 11 and we will begin in verse 13. Paul is warning this Corinthian church, that he just raked over the coals, about something very important. From the New Living Translation:

2 Corinthians 11:13 *These people are false apostles. They have fooled you by disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.*

14) *But I am not surprised. Even Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light [deceiving people].*

15) *So it is no wonder that his servants can also do it by pretending to be godly ministers. In the end they will get every bit of punishment their wicked deeds deserve. (NLT)*

We see that there were false apostles in Paul's day trying to deceive the people. So we have to ask ourselves, false apostles in Paul's day, who was behind them, who was provoking them, who was deceiving them? Obviously it's Satan, wanting to get at God's people. He is the great deceiver. The deception goes on to this very day. It's gone on since the era of the first century church, down to this very time, more than 2,000 years later. As Solomon said, there's nothing new under the sun, so we should expect it. I know of three or four people—men—claiming to be the only apostle. Now that's an oxymoron in itself. How can you be the only apostle when you have three or four of them claiming it? So you know something is rotten there. One of them is claiming that he and he alone is great enough to train the Two Witnesses—he said this publicly—great enough to train the Two Witnesses. Do you think there might be some deception involved in that claim? All of them say—guess what they say—don't follow God, don't follow Christ, follow me. Follow a man, and all of them are self-deceived.

I'm not trying to put down any individual or group, all I'm saying is, look, it happened in New Testament times and it's happening now. So just be aware. Look at the self, let's examine ourselves, and just make sure we're following what's in God's word and not what somebody says about God's word. I heard one of them say—heard it with my own ears—if you follow me and do what I say, you're not accountable for what you do, I am accountable for what you do. There again, that's not what the Bible says. We have to stand before God ourselves, not on somebody's right side or left side, not on somebody's coattails, we have to stand in front of God (my guess is, naked—I bet you we will be, just as naked as jaybirds in front of God) and we are going to have to account for everything we have done and everything we have said, and you can't look over and say, the minister made me do it. Or Satan made me do it. No, we did it. This went on then, and it's going on now.

Remember what Peter told the High Priest, remember early on in Acts—we won't turn there—in Acts 5 they were preaching the gospel in the Temple and the hierarchy had

them thrown in jail, and then an angel came and broke them out of jail. When they came to get them the next day, all the doors were locked, the guards were still there, they looked in, and nobody was there. Somebody is going to pay for this, and the council was saying, what on earth, what's going on? Then somebody came in and said, they're in the Temple preaching like they were yesterday. So they brought Peter and the apostles before the High Priest and the council, saying, we told you not to do this, and Peter said, we had better obey God and not men. That's the crux of the matter—obey God and not what men say about God or what men say you should do. Obey what God says in His word. Now what we have to look forward to from this day forth is a huge deception that's coming down the road. Let's go to Revelation 13:11. This will come—we can have absolute faith that this will happen, so let's think about this and what our reaction is going to be when it actually occurs.

Revelation 13:11 *And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. (KJV)*

Well, there's some deception here.

12) *And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast ... (KJV)*

How do you get the people on the earth to worship this beast? You have to do something pretty miraculous.

13) *And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men ... (KJV)*

Now with the modern communications we have and the cell phones that take instantaneous videos and pictures, if somebody brings fire down from heaven, the Internet will go completely berserk and people will know it almost instantaneously. Here is a man who can call fire down from heaven and who says we need to worship this beast. That's pretty amazing.

14) *And deceiveth them [who is behind the deception?] that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast ... (KJV)*

This implies falling down and worshipping this beast, making an idol of it, making the beast an idol, or making an idol to the beast, whichever it may be—it doesn't make any difference, just fall down and worship it because of the miracles that you have just witnessed. He's showing them that he's got the power to do this.

We see here that the time is coming when we're going to see miracles by human beings and these human beings will tell us to worship somebody other than God. This is what this says—this is going to happen. We may think things are not so bad or things are

going to just keep going the way they've always gone but at some point in time, an individual is going to call down fire from heaven and is going to say, the power behind that, you need to worship. Pretty powerful example. This being is telling humanity, you need to worship this, not God. Yet what does God's word say? Let's go to Luke 4:8. This is out of Jesus' mouth. He had fasted forty days and forty nights; He knew what was coming; Satan was trying to deceive Him, Satan was trying to get Him to turn from His Father, His God, and to worship Satan. Jesus just called a spade a spade.

Luke 4:8 *And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me... (KJV)*

I don't want anything to do with you, I don't want to look at you, I don't want hear about you, I don't want to hear from you.

8 continued) ... *Get thee behind me Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. (KJV)*

Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 6:13. He was also quoting chapter 13, verse 4. When this event happens, we will have a choice to make. People are going to be all caught up in these miracles—all caught up in them. People who aren't close to God are going to fall for this. They're going to be deceived: Look, God must be with him—look at the power. They aren't close enough to God and haven't been close enough to God to see that this was prophesied, that we had better prepare ourselves and be ready. God says, you shall worship the Lord your God. Peter said we had better obey God rather than men. So at that moment in time, we must choose, so we need to be close to God in order to choose God and not follow Satan's gigantic deception. Can you imagine this? It's a gigantic deception. We think he deceives now, wait until then.

So let's conclude. We have seen that it's possible for us to be deceived. Remember that the Allies, in a human, physical way, deceived the entire nation of Germany, the entire hierarchy, the command structure of Germany, including Hitler himself. We've seen that Satan deceives the entire world. So how do we avoid being deceived? Let's go to one final scripture, John 17:3. Something we can't forget. Something I'm ashamed to say I read over for forty or fifty years.

John 17:3 [Christ is speaking] *And this is life eternal, [red flags go up, antennae go up, this is what I need to know] that they might know thee the only true God [Christ says], and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (KJV)*

So how do we avoid deception? To know the only true God and to know His Son, Jesus Christ, to know Their relationship, Their roles, Their activities in the record of scripture, to know what They expect of us, to be so close to Them that when Satan's deception reaches fruition, we will not be carried along with it. So as Passover comes, let's continue to grow closer to God so that all of us can avoid being deceived.