

803 Are We Deceived?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

The U.S. Military Academy at West Point has a simple but rigorous honor code. It simply says, "A Cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate those who do." Honesty and integrity have always been important to our nation's military. But I wonder how important it is to the rest of us. Sometimes gullible and sometimes deceptive, Americans today seem all too ready to believe what they like, whether it's true or not. Stay with us for the beginning of an important Bible study. Today we're asking the question, "Are we deceived?" Several years ago, a book entitled, *The Day America Told the Truth* was published. It revealed that though 90 percent of Americans believe in God, 90 percent of Americans also tell lies. It seems many are gullible, willing to believe many things that simply aren't true. It is easy to say all religions are alike, that one idea is as good as another, but aren't we deceiving ourselves if we say that?

Colossae was a small town in the Lycus River valley on the main route from Ephesus to the Euphrates. Hieropolis and Laodicea were only a few miles away but were important cities. Colossae had lost much of its importance. Romans, Greeks, and transplanted Jews lived there, and the frequent visitors made it a place susceptible to every new idea that came along. The inspired apostle Paul wrote the Colossian letter to deal with a strange doctrine arising among some members of the church. He wrote to warn them of the false teaching and deception in this worldly philosophy.

God's Word says in Colossians 2:1-8: "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

"Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." A smooth talking stranger can easily fool a naïve person with false promises and worldly traditions that sound good. Paul warned them not to be fooled by such nonsense. They would find the truth in listening to Jesus Christ.

Learning to distinguish what is true from what is false is one of the most important lessons of life. Some traditions are true, while others are false. A tradition is merely a belief or a practice that has been passed down from one generation to the next. If a belief is in error in one generation, it will be an error in the next; but the second generation has never heard anything else and so assumes what it hears to be true. Once a deceptive tradition becomes accepted and is passed down from generation to generation, that idea can hardly be shown false. Soooo, people continue to believe a lie. They won't listen to anyone who tries to tell them the truth. This is why many of the first-century Jews rejected Jesus and why many people in the ancient world rejected Christianity.

Disbelief is the rejection of a belief, a refusal to accept it. To disbelieve in Jesus is to reject him as the Son of God. This might come in the form of denying His miracles or refusing to believe in His resurrection. It also might come in the form of refusing to believe the things that He teaches. The Lord Jesus said in John 12:48, "The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day." Failure to believe Jesus is a serious matter. Many people will find themselves rejected on the last day because they failed to believe what Jesus teaches.

To misbelieve is to be convinced something untrue is correct. To deceive is to cause someone to hold a wrong view and thus be mistaken. The Lord Jesus condemns those who teach falsehoods and errors. Paul was shocked when some false teachers were misleading the churches of Galatia. In strong language, the apostle of the Lord said in Galatians 1:6-9, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."

Now why would Paul say that teaching a false gospel leads one to be accursed? Because changing up what God says and teaches misleads people to believe a lie. When people believe a lie they follow after something other than God and separate themselves from God. The number one way Satan separates people from God is by lying to them. The Lord Jesus said about the devil in John 8:44, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." The devil lied to Eve and caused her to sin against God and to die spiritually and physically. Lies still lead people into sin and spiritual death. Don't ever think that it doesn't matter what you believe.

People today are deceived by all kinds of falsehoods, fabrications, and half-truths. A half-truth is when someone tells you a truthful fact that leaves out other relevant information. For instance, it is true that Sarah was Abraham's half-sister. Sarah was also Abraham's wife. So when Abraham in fear told Pharaoh that Sarah was his sister, he was half right. Abraham's lie caused lots of trouble. Half-truths are some of the most dangerous kinds of lies. There is enough truth to fool people into accepting them, but there is enough falsehood to lead to destruction. A Christian must be very careful to examine everything he hears.

A fabrication is fiction. Some false prophets in the days of Jeremiah began fabricating their prophecies. Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 23:16, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD.'" False prophets in every age had led countless souls away from the will of God. This is why we must examine everything carefully. Acts 17:11 says, "Now these [Bereans] were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." We too should test everything by God's Holy Word the Bible to see what is true and what is false.

Some lies that do the most harm are the ones we tell ourselves. God's Word says in Jeremiah 17:9-10, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds." Our hearts may tell us what we want to hear rather than what is right. If we listen to our hearts and desires rather than to the Lord, we can easily do the wrong thing spiritually, morally or practically. Solomon said in Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death."

When people wish something to be true, they can often make it true in their own minds, whether it is really true or not. These folks set their minds and can hardly be changed. They have to find out the hard way. The prodigal son was like that. He had to have his inheritance and live life the

way he wanted. So . . . , when his father gave in, he took his money to a far country and wasted it in a sinful lifestyle. He had to ruin himself before he would admit how foolish and sinful he had been. I hope, my friend, that you haven't allowed your heart to deceive you into making foolish choices. The prodigal son lied to himself until he couldn't believe his lies anymore. Then he came to his senses, repented, and went home.

Many people are ready to believe a lie, if they think it will benefit them. In a politically correct world people are often willing to turn a blind eye to the truth and focus on what convenient and popular. They would rather give in to a lie than embarrass themselves by taking an unpopular position. Some people think it shows wisdom or love to take a position of neutrality on every controversial issue. Others think we can never determine what is true, so every view is as good as every other. This view is miles away from the heart and the teaching of Jesus; it is not wise but willingly ignorant. It may appear to accommodate others in love, but this view shows no love to the will of God. You see, God did not create every religion; and not every religion teaches His will.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" Being religious does not guarantee that one is righteous. Some people say they are saved by faith alone, but this passage makes it clear that one must in addition to believing also do God's will. These people who lived lawless lives deceived themselves into thinking they were still all right with God. Jesus, however, told them to depart. He never knew them or had a relationship with them.

You see, it matters what we believe and how we live. For many years I have heard people embrace the doctrine of a "faith only" salvation. It is a very convenient and popular doctrine. They suggest all one must do to be saved is believe, and once one is saved one cannot be lost. But this doctrine did not come from Jesus. People who believe in the "faith only" doctrine always have to take it back. You see, you can't be saved without loving God, without repenting, or without obeying the Lord Jesus. Faith is essential, but you have to do these things in addition to saying you believe. People who don't do the will of the Father will be rejected. That's what Jesus said. It does take more than faith to please God. It takes love, repentance, and obedience.

I hear people say that one religion is as good as another and all religions are the same. Is that true? The Lord Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Any religion without Jesus can't be the path to the Father. Again, Acts 4:12 says about Jesus: "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." It may be convenient and popular to say that all religions are the same, but this view does not agree with the Bible. I must at some point decide whether I will listen to Jesus or listen to popular beliefs. I choose Jesus. I choose to listen to Him.

Why should I choose Him? Jesus is Lord. The world may judge me here, but Jesus will judge me for eternity. Where I spend eternity matters to me. Why listen to Jesus? Because Jesus died for me and loves me. Why listen to Jesus? Because Jesus only tells the Truth. The world may say one thing one day and another thing another, but Jesus' words are consistent. They are true and remain until the end of time. Why would I want to listen to beliefs that change with the wind? William Inge said, "He who marries the spirit of an age soon finds himself to be a widow." I don't want a fad or a passing idea. I want eternal truth, truth that does not change or compromise. You find eternal truth in the eternal words of Jesus. That's why I do not want anyone but Him. No one but Jesus can take me to heaven. No one but Jesus can forgive my sins. No one but Jesus will come again in the clouds. No one but Jesus will judge me on the last day. I don't want anyone but Jesus.

There is another deception that will cost people their souls. It's not a theological error or a moral problem, but it will cost many people their souls. They too will be rejected by Jesus due to this misbelieve. What is it? It's the belief "I can always change things later." Later. Some people think they have plenty of time to get right with the Lord. They think there will always be tomorrow to change their lives and become the kind of person God desires. They put off obeying the gospel, put off developing their spiritual lives, put off serving God, until a more convenient time. But will there be a more convenient time? For many it will never come. You see one season follows another, and there desire to serve God isn't any stronger "later" than it was "before." So . . . they do nothing to get right with God.

The inspired writer James said in James 4:13-17, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit'—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'" As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." Telling you "later" is the devil's way of getting your mind off spiritual things and getting it back into worldly things. He doesn't want you thinking about the cross, about church, about your salvation, or about heaven and hell. He wants you to live for the present and put off changing your life till "later."

Today is really the only day you have to make your soul right with God. If you love the Lord and want to be right with Him, love and put your faith in Him. Repent of your sins and be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you obey the gospel out of love and faith by repenting and being baptized, God washes away every sin and adds you to His church. You become a child of God and have the hope of an eternal inheritance in heaven. I can't think of any good reason why anyone would say, "later." Why not attend one the churches of Christ near you. Tell them you want to obey the gospel and be a part of the congregation. Get involved in the church, serve the Lord, and make your faith a priority. Won't you do this today?

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