



Are You Deceived?

If asked the question: “Are you deceived?”, I believe almost every Christian would answer negatively. They imagine that they are not and probably could not be deceived. However, some of these confident people may be in for a real surprise.

The reason for this is that no one who is deceived realizes it. The very nature of deception is that the person involved in it is unaware of his or her condition. Once someone comes to the realization that they have been misled, deception disappears. Then, they are no longer deceived. Such a person may willingly remain in error or continue adhering to some falsehood, but he is no longer deceived.

Since the individual involved in deception is totally unaware of his plight, there is a very great danger in believing that we are not or that we cannot be deceived. No one should become overconfident concerning his present condition. The frailty of man’s nature combined with the subtlety of God’s enemy results in the astonishing fact that almost every professing Christian is in some measure – however small or large it may be – deceived. While this may sound strange, it is nevertheless true.

I can imagine that there are very few believers walking the earth today who are so saturated with Divine truth, whose relationship with God is so intimate and whose lives are so completely free of darkness that they have escaped deception entirely.

All this is being said to point out a simple fact. It is easy to be deceived. Furthermore, when you are a victim of deception you are completely unaware of it.

Consequently, it might be healthy for every reader to take a moment and ask themselves the following questions: “Is it possible that I might in some measure be

deceived?” “Could there be some hidden misconception working in my life of which I am totally unaware?” “Is it conceivable that the devil has some strongholds in my heart about which I know nothing?” And, “If there are such undesirable influences present, how can I become free from them?”

Ultimately, the only thing which can expose our deception and liberate us from it is the light of God. Jesus promised His followers that they would not walk in darkness but have the “light of life” (Jn 8:12). If we are deceived it is because we are still living in darkness; there are some areas of our heart which have not been illuminated by God. It is here that the devil and his agents work without our knowledge. However, once the light of Jesus dawns within us and exposes the darkness, its power is removed. Once we see how we have been misled, we are no longer under the dominion of it. In Jesus Christ, we have the power to overcome the enemy.

One reason that so many believers are still in his grasp is that they have not yielded their life wholly to God and thereby received enough of His light to show them where they are ensnared.

With all this in mind, we will be examining a few of the more common deceptions which are at work in today’s Christian community.

ONE COMMON DECEPTION

We live today in an unusual time, from a biblical point of view. Today, many Christians own one or more Bibles. They have in their hands a marvelous compilation of the words and purposes of God.

In times past, things were different. Before the invention of the printing press, the availability of biblical manuscripts was very limited. They needed to be copied by hand. Further, much of the population of the world in those times was illiterate. Even if everyone had had a copy of the scriptures, they could not have read it.

This modern availability of the Bible is a tremendous blessing. It has made the revelations of God accessible to almost everyone. Those who take the time to read and meditate upon these God-given words, have the privilege of being able to re-

ceive understanding concerning God's person and His eternal purposes with much more ease and convenience.

However, there is a danger here of which many are unaware. Due to this availability of the scriptures, it has become easy for man to approach the Word of God from a merely human standpoint. It is all too possible for men and women to try to understand the Bible mentally.

Through study, research and reasoning, they can come to many conclusions concerning what God has written. Further, they begin to confide in, and conduct their lives according to, this mental analysis instead of following a living God.

Thus their human understanding of the Bible becomes their guide in the place of Jesus. As incredible as this may seem, many today substitute knowledge of the Bible for a genuine, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ Himself. In this way, they have been deceived.

In times past, things were quite different. Those who believed in Jesus were pressed to learn to know Him personally and intimately so that they could follow Him. Since most did not have the scriptures immediately available, they needed to learn how to hear from, follow and obey God Himself. It is easy to understand that the early believers and many disciples through the ages, could not and did not depend merely upon writings to guide their life.

The first apostles and others who wrote the New Testament were such men. They became born-again of the Holy Spirit and then began following the risen man, Christ Jesus. Their personal experience with Him led them to pen letters and historical accounts of Jesus' life which were anointed by and inspired by God. These writings were the result of – not the source of – their intimate relationship with a living, risen Lord.

Of course, when they were able to access parts of the Scriptures including the Old Testament, this was of great help to them. Obviously, what God has revealed of Himself through His written word was extremely precious. Yet they did not look to a book to guide their life. Instead, they learned to know and follow the person Jesus who was revealed in the book.

The Bible was not given to us to use as a textbook. It is not meant to be a manual or guide book by which we should live our lives. It is certainly not meant to be a substitute for God Himself. The Bible was intended to be a means through which God reveals Himself to us. In every page, the nature and person of our Lord is evident. It must be through knowing this Person, that our lives are guided, not merely through following a set of biblical rules or principles.

Yet many have begun to take the Bible as their guide. In a subtle way, it has begun to substitute for a genuine relationship with Jesus in their lives. They consider themselves to be believers in “the Bible” and followers of the “Word.” But instead of seeking to know Jesus in its pages, they have become followers of a book full of laws, principles, practices and doctrines.

Many believe that they are supposed to be following “the word of God” by which they mean the Bible. However, the truth is that “the Word of God” is a person, not a book. We read in Revelation 19:13: “He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God.”

Although God is revealed in the Bible, following the Bible is not the same thing as following Him. We are called to follow a living Person and not simply a set of rules, regulations and principles.

Let it be very clear here that I am in no way, trying to diminish or discount the importance of the Bible. During my 46 years of following Christ, very few days have passed in which I have not spent time meditating on what God has revealed to us in the Bible. I am convinced that the scriptures which we have today are an accurate and reliable record of what God both said and did in the past. I am persuaded, after many years of meditating on the scriptures, that the contents of the Bible were inspired by God Himself.

Even though all this is true, one thing must become very clear to us. We were not, are not, and in fact cannot be saved by believing in the Bible. The Bible did not die for our sins and resurrect on the third day. This book is not our savior. Mere words, even though they were given by God, apart from the revelation of God Himself, can never save us. We are saved by believing in a living, resurrected Person, Jesus Christ.

We are not urged by the scriptures to believe in a book, but in Jesus. We read: “...you believe in God, believe also in Me” (Jn 14:1). We are not sanctified and transformed simply by following biblical principles. We are not delivered from our self and our sins by a book. For this kind of salvation to occur, our faith must be in a Person and not in written words as accurate and important as they may be. He is the only One who can save us.

But for many the Bible has become an idol. It is the Bible which they worship and it is upon the Bible they depend. This book has taken the place of God in their lives. Their focus is on the Bible. They are believers in the Bible, followers of the Bible, and preachers of the Bible. In their minds, their “Bible-believing” attitude is the most holy position possible. It is their belief in this book which justifies them in their own minds.

It is a great mistake to try to use the Bible apart from the Author Himself. It is a serious error to use the Bible as a textbook instead of a source through which our Lord can reveal Himself.

Such activity can never help us. It will only produce a kind of pride and self-justification which can never please God. It generates a variety of legalistic, mental, dry Christianity which neither saves or delivers those who practice it nor satisfies God.

To aid the reader in understanding this truth, let us take a look at the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. They had the Old Testament which was given by God, written down for them. They were educated and literate. So they studied this book daily. From it they extracted many laws, principles and formulas to guide their lives.

They probably spent more time studying the scriptures than many modern Christians. Through their efforts, they became extremely religious. Yet they failed to come to know the Author. They did not really know the Father. They thought they knew many things about Him, but He Himself they did not know. Their analysis of the Scriptures was human, mental and defective.

Therefore, when God manifested Himself in His Son, they did not know Him. They did not recognize Him as the One who is revealed in the Old Testament. This lack of knowing God Himself led them to hate, persecute and eventually kill

the One who wished to reveal Himself to them through the Scriptures. Certainly their mental analysis of this book had done them no good.

Jesus affirmed this truth when He said to them: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (Jn 5:39). God’s thought is that we would come to Him, through the scriptures, not use them as a substitute for a relationship with Himself.

We are further warned: “Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you – Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me” (Jn 5:45,46).

You see, when Moses wrote, He wrote about the reality of God – His true expression which is Jesus. Moses wrote about what the Father had revealed of Himself to him. The same thing is true of all the rest of the scriptures. The men who wrote them down were merely recording what God had shown them concerning Himself, His ways and His desires.

Herein lies a powerful deception into which many believers have fallen. They come to the Bible to study and to learn. Through it they develop many principles and guidelines for their lives and their meetings. Many have excerpted from its pages rules about their clothing styles, activities and haircuts. Others have garnered regulations about how, when and where they meet. Their times together are conducted following many seemingly correct rules and principles they have extracted for the New Testament.

Yet, in far too many cases, they have not become intimate with Jesus. They have succeeded in learning about Him, but have not really come to know Him well. Through their study they have accumulated knowledge concerning God, but they have not developed an intimacy with God which has changed their hearts and therefore, their lives. This is an unfortunate, yet common deception among the people of God.

LACK OF LOVE

This lack of knowing the person of God intimately reveals itself in many ways. One of the most unfortunate manners in which this becomes evident is when someone ceases to agree with a Christian group about some doctrine or practice.

It may be that the leaders of a particular group and the members thereof present an appearance of righteousness. It may be that their dress, doctrines and activities seem biblical and correct. But when someone begins to disagree with them things can change rapidly. When someone does not any longer conform to their ways and beliefs, suddenly fangs and claws can appear. Their “love” disappears. They begin to reject, hate and persecute those whom they had previously accepted and pretended to love.

This kind of behavior reveals a lack of intimate knowledge of God. It exposes the fact that their “religion” is more mental, (ie. based upon intellectual knowledge) than genuine. These folks have perhaps learned many things about God, but have not become intimate with the Lord Himself. This lack is unmasked by the lack of love.

In I John 4:8 we read: “He who does not love does not know God [intimately], for God is love.” I have added the word “intimately” here based on the Greek word “know” (GINOSKO), which implies a knowing which is much more than a mere encounter.

It signifies an intimate knowing of the person. Vine, in his dictionary of New Testament words defines this Greek work thusly: “...to come to know, recognize, understand” or “to understand completely.”

THEY DID NOT KNOW ME

The result of this intimate knowing of the person of God is that we express His own feelings, His heart. Since He is love and loves His children profoundly, when we are walking in intimate communion with Him, we too will experience and express these same sentiments.

In Jeremiah 2:8 we read about a similar understanding. God rebukes the students of the scriptures in those days saying: “The priests did not say, ‘Where is the

Lord?’ And those who handle the law did not know Me.” You see, these were merely religious people. They were “handling” the law, but not seeing beyond what was written. They were leaders and even “priests” of the Lord, but they did not know Him.

Consequently, their decisions and how they interpreted God’s word was skewed. It did not reflect the heart of their Maker. Instead, what they did, said and decided was a result of mental, human study of the scriptures and was not a result of knowing God. Their religion was in vain.

In order to use or “handle” the Bible correctly, we must first have an intimacy with the author. It is only through a genuine knowledge of His person that we can really understand what He is revealing. Simple mental, human analysis is not sufficient. It falls far short of the mark. The author of the Scriptures is the only One competent to correctly interpret them.

THE INVISIBLE JESUS

Some Christians seem to have the notion that, after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, He disappeared into heaven. Then, to compensate for His absence, arranged for us to have the Bible as a kind of instruction manual to follow while He was gone. Perhaps they suppose that if they follow the guidance of the Bible correctly then, when Jesus returns, He will reward them for their obedience.

The fallacy of this thinking is that Jesus is not absent from this world. He is simply invisible. He has not left us alone to follow the Bible, but He requires us to know and follow Him through the Holy Spirit.

When He sent the Holy Spirit to us He said something very interesting. He stated: “I am... coming to you (Jn 14:28 KJV). He indeed did not leave us alone. He came back to us invisibly in “the Spirit.” We read: “Now the Lord is that Spirit” (II Cor 3:17).

Who is this Lord? Obviously it is Jesus. How can this be? The Lord, who is Jesus, is actually the Spirit? Certainly, this is so. It is a clear teaching of the scrip-

tures. The Holy Spirit and Jesus are not separate beings. Jesus and the Spirit are as one with each other as Jesus is with His Father (Jn 10:30).

The fact is that the Spirit of God is the same as the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Paul illustrates this when he refers to the Holy Spirit as “...the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Php 1:19). It is clear that there is only one Spirit, not two. We read: “There is one body and one Spirit...” (Eph 4:4). There can be no such thing as the Holy Spirit separate and distinct from Spirit of Jesus Christ as if there were two different “Spirits.”

Therefore, when we know and interact with the Holy Spirit, we are at the same time knowing and interacting with Jesus Christ. He is with us – right here and now – in and through the Holy Spirit. They are absolutely inseparable. “Now the Lord [really] is that Spirit” (II Cor 3:17).

All of this is to say that we still need to follow the person Jesus Christ just as the first disciples did. He is not absent. We are not limited merely to obeying instructions found in a book, as important as that book might be. Jesus is present with us right now and forever. He said: “...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen” (Mt 28:20). He is “with us” today. Consequently, we must know and follow Him personally.

Please pay careful attention to this fact: Although Jesus is definitely and accurately revealed in His Book, following the book is not the same thing as following Him.

After His death and resurrection, Jesus did something very unusual to teach His disciples this truth. He frequently appeared and disappeared. When He appeared, He knew what they had been saying and doing in His “absence.” Why did He do this? What was His message? He was showing them graphically and unmistakably that He was always with them. Whether He was visibly present or invisibly present, He was always there.

Jesus was teaching them to begin to depend upon His invisible presence and not get stuck always wanting Him to appear physically. He was instructing them that they could know and follow Him just as they always had when He was visible, even though now they could not see Him.

When Jesus walked the earth, He was in one small country in one location at a time. The number of His disciples was small. Therefore, His physical presence was sufficient. But today, this number of disciples has grown. There are millions, if not billions, of believers in the world today. Our Lord cannot be physically present with each one of them, since this would require Him to have millions of bodies. Yet, His invisible presence through the Holy Spirit is always with each and every one of us.

DECEIVED BY REVELATION

Biblical revelation is good. Assuming that what has been revealed comes from God and therefore is biblical, it is of great value. Such revelation gives us direction. It helps us to understand God and His purposes. It aids us by showing us our spiritual path onward and how we can become more like Jesus. Yet, it is possible and even common for people to be deceived by such genuine revelation. How could such a thing be?

Let me try to explain this by giving an illustration. From the window in my kitchen in Brazil I can see a very tall mountain in the distance. By the grace of God I still have good vision and so, on a clear day, I can see the outline of that mountain quite clearly. Yet, in spite of this clarity of vision, I am not there. I am not on top of that mountain.

In order to arrive on that peak I would have to travel a great distance, perhaps 30 to 40 miles. I am quite sure that there is no road going up that mountain. To get to the top therefore, would involve a lot of work. There would be other mountains to climb and descend, rushing streams and/or rivers to cross, thick jungle growth to get through, an army of mosquitoes and other bugs to combat along with poisonous snakes, spiders and plants, much sweat to endure and fatigue to overcome. If and when I were able to reach the summit of that mountain, I would be a person with many more experiences and much more personal knowledge of that mountain than I am at present simply sitting in my kitchen.

The same thing is true of revelation. We may see some biblical truths with clarity. They may be true in every way. Yet, until they become our experience through

many trials and much time and testing, they remain only remote understanding, yet nothing which is truly real in our lives. Yet many, seeing for the first time some exciting revelations, begin to think of themselves as the fulfillment of what they have seen. They begin to imagine that they are what they have seen, just because they have glimpsed something.

As an example, let me share with you an experience I had as a young believer. I was meeting with a group which had recently received some teaching about the “overcomers” in the book of Revelation. Much of this teaching was based on the promises of Jesus to those in the seven churches who would hear His word and overcome. This was an exciting and captivating revelation.

Soon however, we thought of ourselves as the overcomers. Since we had understood something about what this means, we began to imagine that we were what we had seen. We rejoiced in the revelation, thinking that since we had understood it, we were it. We thought of ourselves as overcomers and even called ourselves “overcomers.” We secretly began to look down on those who did not have this revelation and therefore, obviously, were not overcomers like ourselves. From hindsight, it is clear that we were very deceived.

Dear friend, through the years one thing has become very clear: to see is not the same thing as to be and, to understand is not the same thing as to live out the reality of what we have perceived. It takes much time and experience for God to work into our lives what He has shown to us. It is not sufficient merely to see and understand. We must seek God, asking Him to make what we have seen an integral, genuine part of our lives.

For example, it would be possible for someone to become an expert on the afore mentioned mountain without ever climbing up it.

They could “Google” it. They could buy topographical maps and learn about the terrain. They could find out about the climate, the maximum and minimum temperatures recorded there in all four seasons. They could familiarize themselves with facts about the humidity of the air and the amount of rainfall. They could find someone who had analyzed the soil and geography and learn from them.

They could study the various plants which grew there, including trees, orchids, ferns, vines, etc.

They could find out about the animal life on that mountain, no doubt including a great variety of beasts, birds and bugs. They may even be able to find others who had climbed up there and discover the best access routes and possible problems.

The availability of potable water, the best times of year to climb, the time necessary to ascend and descend and many other facts could be studied and learned. In the end, this person could become a “Doctor” of facts about this mountain without ever having been there.

This little story has a very real application to the practice of Christianity. Is it possible that our Christian lives have much more to do with what we have learned about Christ than with our actual experience of Christ? Could it be that we have filled ourselves with a tremendous amount of knowledge about Him but not spent much time having intimate fellowship with Him?

Are we really following Jesus or are we simply following some precepts and customs which we have learned? Is it the Christ who is really reigning over us or are we simply conforming ourselves to the expected pattern of the group or church which we attend?

Is our Christian behavior merely a result of what we learned about God or genuine transformation which results from intimacy with God? Dear friends, these are serious and important considerations.

BRONZE SERPENTS

Many believers enjoy revelation. Obviously, revelation is important for all of us. Without it, we really don't have any goals. We don't have any direction or understand where it is that we are supposed to be going. We are blind and in darkness. Revelation is both essential and delightful.

It is necessary that we see and understand many things concerning the plans and purposes of our God. The more He reveals to us, the more we can cooperate with Him in His work. Through revelation, we have divine direction and objectives. When we have a greater understanding of His person and work, we can be more easily led by Him and waste less time doing works which are not satisfying His heart.

Even though all this is true, revelation also can become a kind of trap. It can become an idol. It can easily become a substitute for a relationship with Jesus Himself. Incredibly, revelation about Jesus can subtly take the place of intimacy with Jesus. This is a type of deception which also is extremely common in the church today.

It is easy today to encounter individuals or even groups of Christians who have a lot of revelation. They have read many books, perhaps by Watchman Nee, A.W. Tozer, Andrew Murray, Charles Finney, T. Austin-Sparks, etc. Through literature or teaching, they have come to understand and see many important, spiritual truths.

Their level of comprehension concerning many biblical mysteries is, in some cases, astounding. Yet, for far too many, their everyday living does not reflect the nature of Christ. How can such a thing be?

One problem is that frequently, these revelations are things received secondhand. These believers have understood what others have seen. But these revelations have not yet become their own experience. God has not yet worked these things into their lives so that these revelations have actually become real to them personally.

Such secondhand or even thirdhand revelation quite easily makes the person who receives it proud. They become puffed up because they have understood certain truths. It is not infrequent that such believers never move on to actually know these things for themselves.

It is natural that once we see and understand some revelations, we begin to rejoice in what we have seen. Perhaps we find others who also have come to know

the same things, or have received these revelations from us. But here too is a danger.

If we are not careful, soon our meetings and our fellowship with these others becomes centered around these certain understandings. Our focus becomes our revelations. Our sphere of meetings and/or fellowship becomes dedicated to repeating and propagating these certain truths.

In many cases, the hearts of believers become captivated by these revelations. They begin to seek to know with ever more clarity, the deep things of God. When they open the Bible, it is revelation which they are seeking. They are always buying new books which might contain new viewpoints on the Scriptures. Yet in all this, it is possible that they are not truly becoming more intimate with Jesus Christ.

You see, revelation too can become a god. It can become an idol in your life. It is something which can attract and capture your heart, replacing an intimacy with Jesus. This is something very subtle. Assuming that these revelations are both biblical and true, it is often difficult to see how we can be misled by them or misuse them. Yet it is a common ailment in many groups of believers.

The bronze serpent which Moses made in the wilderness, was ordained by God (Num 21:8,9). It was the Lord who instructed him to make it. Further, it was used by God to miraculously heal thousands. Yet with the passage of time, it became an idol. People began to worship it rather than the Lord. So, when Hezekiah became king and orchestrated a kind of revival or return to the Lord, he broke the brass serpent in pieces and destroyed it (II Kings 8:4).

In the same way today many individuals or even groups of believers are meeting around some kind of biblical understanding instead of a Person. Their unity is based upon some revelation or other and not on the Lord.

How many, for example, meet around some particular way of taking “the Lord’s table,” some practice or “stand” about “how to meet,” or any number of other doctrines, patterns or “revelations?” This could be the baptism of the Holy Spirit, healing or end times prophecy. It could involve the name of their church or even the lack of a name. The list is endless.

Unfortunately, it is not difficult to find groups who spend their time together simply repeating the same series of revelations to each other, rejoicing in the fact that they are some of the few who have such deep understanding.

Yet in far too many cases, the daily lives of these believers do not reflect the character of their Maker. Their transformation has not caught up with their revelation. Yet they are blinded to this fact because they have seen so much. They think that they have much more revelation than many other Christians. So they continue on rejoicing in, meeting around and even worshipping their revelations while Jesus Himself is pushed to the side.

As an example of this I would like to tell the story of a friend of mine. He and his family left the U.S. to be missionaries in South Africa. He was a brother with a lot of revelation who understood much of what many call “the deeper life” teachings. So while in South Africa he naturally gravitated toward fellowship with others who had a similar understanding of the Bible.

But when he returned to the U.S. he was completely disillusioned. He had come to a kind of crisis in his faith, questioning much of what he had believed. Why was this? It was because his relationships with others who had these same revelations was so disappointing. In spite of all their understanding, they did not reflect the nature of Christ.

One woman in particular stood out to Him. She was always talking about these wonderful “deep things.” She was a major proponent of the authors which we have already mentioned. Her focus was these fantastic revelations. Yet her life was a shambles.

Her marriage was bad. She was not living the things which she had seen but she was blinded to this fact due to the “greatness” of what she had understood. Her life was a kind of lie which had a great impact on this dear brother. Instead of transmitting Christ to him, she actually undermined his faith by her testimony.

Significantly Paul the apostle writes: “And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know” (I Cor 8:2). Certainly true “knowing” must be knowing the Person who gives us knowledge and not merely understanding many biblical truths.

SEE MUCH, DO LITTLE

One thing has impressed me very much while observing today's church. There is one fact which is very disturbing. It seems that the groups which have the most revelation, do the least. They have so much understanding, yet the world around them is impacted very little.

Instead of being motivated by these great truths to go out and minister Jesus to the multitudes, they begin to focus on themselves and their revelations. Their group becomes a kind of ingrown toenail curving in upon itself.

Soon they begin to think of themselves as some kind of "remnant." They imagine that they are especially chosen by God to practice a certain thing or to believe in some special teachings.

They then "circle the wagons" around what they do or believe and begin to try to protect their beliefs and practices from error. They imagine themselves to be the guardians of a whole series of special truths with which they have been entrusted. These truths become the focus of their lives. This is a common and very deep deception.

Others who don't agree with their understandings are subtly excluded. The uninitiated are looked upon with disfavor, distrust or even with fear. These believers begin to look inward instead of outward. Their focus becomes their revelations and practices.

Instead of preaching Jesus, they gravitate towards trying to convince others, especially other Christians, of the correctness of their special ways, revelations and doctrines. Thus, they become unfruitful in a truly spiritual way.

SELF DECEPTION

With all this in mind, I would like to take a look at a scripture verse which speaks about still another common form of deception. James 1:22 reads: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." This is also a very

common kind of delusion among God's people. It is a kind of self-deception which has as its victims many who consider themselves to be upstanding, "Bible-believing" Christians.

This folly has in its grasp children of God from all kinds of denominational persuasions, from many diverse schools of doctrinal opinion and from a great variety of religious experience. It has lulled to sleep multitudes who would probably vehemently insist that they are intimately acquainted with the truth and have no room in their life for deception. Perhaps the worst cases of this condition occur among those who have been Christians for many years.

This deception works in the following way: we say we believe in Jesus but we do not follow Him. When we hear the word of the Lord, agree with it in our minds, and do nothing, it is in full operation. It is very common today to meet Christians who are well acquainted with the Scripture, who appear to concur completely with what God is saying to them through it – but who do very little!

How we love to hear messages from the preachers we really admire. How enjoyable it is to read books by those authors who express the facts exactly as we believe them. How often we have been excited about the "new things" which God is showing us. And how deceived we are if we continue to live the same way we always have. This is a very prevalent form of deception in modern Christianity.

We often feel justified merely by the fact that we have heard the truth and agreed with it. This attitude is easily substituted for the activity of both hearing and then obeying. If we are to escape deception, we must be responding to what we hear from the Lord! We must be doing what God speaks to us! We are to be fulfilling the word by moving out in the direction in which God is leading.

A similar form of delusion can also arise from reading many Christian biographies. For example, there are so many good books available which tell of the mighty things God has done through believers down through the centuries. The histories of Hudson Taylor with the China Inland Mission, George Mueller and his orphanage in England, Brother Andrew the Bible smuggler, David Wilkerson on the streets of New York City and many others have been published.

These are valuable books. Reading them can be extremely worthwhile. As we learn of what God has done through others, it can really stimulate our faith. However, I fear that far too many Christians are doing their works for God vicariously. This means that they are living their lives through books rather than actually getting out there and doing something themselves.

We often read about what men and women of God have done. We get excited by the works of faith which they have accomplished. We thrill at the dangers through which they pass and marvel at seeing how the hand of God protected and guided them.

Then, somehow we imagine that, because we are stirred by what we read and can identify with what they have done, our lives too measure up to God's standard. Somehow we feel that our works are similar to theirs.

The sad truth of the matter is that for most believers this is not the case. Far too many Christians are simply hearers of the word and actually serve God very little. They are not really "doers." Oh, they may go to Christian meetings, they may watch Christian television programs and listen to Christian music. They may even be "involved" in their church, but in some measure they are deceived. The evidence of this problem can be clearly seen by the inactivity and lack of fruitfulness in their everyday lives.

The Bible teaches us that faith without works is dead (Jas 2:20). When we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, we are going to be judged according to our works. Why are our works so important? For this simple reason. What we do is a sure indication of what we are. The things which we accomplish are the evidence of what is really going on within our hearts.

Interestingly, the standard is not how much revelation we have. It is not what we have or have not understood. It is how much our genuine relationship with Jesus has changed our lives. It is how much our intimacy with Him has stimulated us to follow Him in service to others.

There is actually no conflict between faith and works. If we have faith – genuine faith – it will produce works. True faith will bring us into an intimacy with Jesus which will stimulate us to reach out in His name, facing the dangers, resis-

tances and our own fears – overcoming the things which hinder us – and working the works of God while there is still time (Jn 9:4). “He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit” (Jn 1:5).

Therefore, if you are not daily serving Jesus Christ in some real, practical way – following the leading of God’s Holy Spirit – then you are in some measure deceived. Anyone who is spending their time in spiritual idleness is badly deceived. They have been lulled to sleep by a subtle deception – a lie that whispers something like this in their ear: “If you go the ‘best’ place and do what is expected of you, if you believe the ‘right way,’ if you read your Bible and pray occasionally, if you don’t do anything really sinful...you are right with God.”

However, we can only be counted righteous before God if we have a relationship with Him which produces fruit in our lives.

Now I know that there are some who will insist that works and obedience are good but that they are not essential. They argue that God’s favor can only be gained through faith. While it is certainly true that a right relationship with God comes only through faith, it does not come through the kind of faith which is barren.

Genuine faith produces communion with God. This communion results in fruitful obedience. If your faith does not, then it is useless. Far too often what Christians call “faith” is nothing more than a mental agreement with some Bible doctrine. True faith, on the other hand is something which brings you into such an intimate relationship with God Himself that it changes your life. The evidence of such life-changing faith is the bearing of fruit.

If this does not describe your life, then it is safe to conclude that you are a victim of deception. Somehow, you have been deluded into thinking that what you are experiencing is real Christianity.

NEITHER BARREN NOR UNFRUITFUL

When God made you and subsequently called you out of darkness into His light, He did so with a specific plan in mind. He has begotten each individual with

the intention that they would accomplish certain things for Him while they are on this earth.

The Bible says that we were “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). God has called us to be neither “barren nor unfruitful” (II Pet 1:8).

There is a job for everyone to do. There is a ministry within Christ’s body for each one to perform. Christian work is not the responsibility of some special clergy or select few. There is no room for spectators among God’s people.

It is incumbent upon every believer to discover God’s assignment for their lives and then, through His grace and power, labor to accomplish it. His will is for us to bring forth much fruit – fruit which remains (Jn 15:16).

Of course Jesus is not asking something which we can accomplish with our own strength. Simply doing some kind of work in the church such as ushering, being part of the worship group or engaging in some kind of Christian ministry may not fulfill God’s desires. It is quite possible to be very active, doing many “things,” and still not be meeting God’s standard.

On Judgment day, when we stand before His throne, all our works will be tested by fire. Only certain kinds of works will endure that test. These are the deeds which were initiated by the Lord Himself. These are not things which we have done “for God” but things which Jesus Christ has actually done through us. Since as Christians we now have the Spirit of God living within us, it is entirely possible, and in fact essential, to let Him become the source of all that we do.

As we grow in this experience, our lives will become increasingly fruitful. We will then be the channels through which Jesus is accomplishing His purposes in this world. These are the sort of works which will be approved when we stand before Him. These are the activities which were truly “wrought in God” (Jn 3:21).

What God is requiring of you and me is a life which is led by His Spirit. It is a life of obedience to His will. It is a life which will be filled with reaching out and serving others in Jesus’ name, imparting to them what God is pouring into us.

Jesus Christ was our supreme example. He was always led by the Spirit. He was continually working the works of God (Jn 10:32). He was daily doing what He saw the Father doing (Jn 5:19).

Jesus was not living for Himself. Not one minute of His life was spent in self-serving activities. His entire existence was focused upon one objective – doing the will of the Father. If we are to be real Christians, being pleasing to our God, this also must be our experience.

The kind of lifestyle I am advocating here may be quite different from the one you are now living. You may be realizing that the foregoing description is quite unlike the life you now lead. If this is your situation, the solution is repentance.

You must humble yourself before God and admit that you have allowed yourself to be deceived. You must confess your sin of disobedience and present yourself to God afresh, telling Him that you are now completely His and that you are willing to follow Him anywhere.

Once you come to this position, you will certainly begin to experience God in a new and exciting way. He is continually looking for men and women who will do His will and so when He finds your heart genuinely open to Him, He will pour Himself out to you. Then you will be empowered to work the works of God on this earth. Then you will begin to experience genuine New Testament Christianity.

AWAKE, AWAKE

God is speaking to His people today. “Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light” (Eph 5:14). The kind of lives which we read about in the Bible and also in many Christian biographies were lives which were totally given to Jesus. They were lives whose only priority was God.

Now to get there from where you are today may demand a major restructuring of your priorities. It might possibly mean a change of occupation, employment or living situation. It no doubt will require abandoning many self-centered pleasures which now fill your life. It may necessitate leaving the safety and security of your own country, family and friends. It may even mean facing dangers of which you

have never dreamed or which you have secretly feared in your heart. But if your faith is genuine as opposed to simply a mental deception, then it demands action.

I cannot tell you what God might require you to do. Only He can reveal this to you. I am simply saying this: If you are doing nothing then you are not walking in faith and communion with God. He is calling you today to repentance and this repentance is no doubt going to involve some radical changes in your life.

I want to make it very clear here that I am speaking about a life of service, not success. The kind of life God requires of you and me is not an easy one. It is not composed of luxury, earthly power and self-gratification as so many preachers today would like us to believe. Instead it is a life of self-denial, sacrifice and difficulty.

We are discussing here a life which is poured out upon the Body of Jesus Christ – a kind of spiritual offering to the Father.

However, such an existence is also supremely satisfying. Nothing in this world can fill your inner emptiness like God. When you yield your life to Him and fill your moments with His service, He in turn will fill you with Himself. Jesus' desire is to express Himself to the world. And so, when He finds your heart open and ready, He will give Himself to you without reserve.

Do you desire this kind of experience? Does this strike some chord within your heart? Would you enjoy living this way? If so, please know that it is entirely possible. God is the same today as He has always been. He can do things in you and through you that you never dreamed possible.

Are you deceived? Only you and God can ultimately know. But as a friend and a brother, I warn you that it is especially easy to be enticed by the seducing spirits of this age and to be lulled to sleep by an easy Christianity.

The New Testament gives us abundant examples of men and women who got up and left all to follow Jesus. These were people who sacrificed everything for the sake of His name. They were doers of the word. They are the ones which were praised by God. They were the kind of people which God commands us to be.

By David W. Dyer

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