

Deceived Part 2

Last Sunday we began a series called Deceived. I mentioned then it was my understanding the Treasury Department trained their officers to spot counterfeit bills, not by studying the counterfeit, but by studying the genuine bills. If you know the real thing, you won't be deceived by the false. I want us to know the truth of God's word so we won't be swept away by false teachers and erroneous teaching.

Do you know what we believe as Christians? For centuries the church has used the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed as concise statements of Christian truth and doctrine. It's the basics. **The Apostle's Creed. I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy, apostolic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.**

The Nicene Creed was written later by church leaders at the Council of Nicea in modern day Turkey in 325. It provided a stronger statement concerning the nature of Jesus in an effort to combat false teachers and error that was being taught. **The Nicene Creed. I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And I believe in one holy and Apostolic Church; I acknowledge one**

baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

These creeds state in some brief sense the core belief of the Christian faith. Departing from these core doctrines is a departure from truth. But how has it happened that with so much knowledge and teaching available we continue to see people deceived and straying from the gospel? Straying even from the clear teaching and doctrine of the divinity of Christ? Let me suggest a few reasons so we can guard our own hearts and lives from error and deception.

We've failed to ground believers in the word of God. We are passionate about evangelism and winning people to Jesus. We've emphasized the new birth, but once a person is born again, we've left them on their own to figure out what the word of God teaches. We wouldn't leave a new born at home to fend for themselves and we mustn't do that with new born believers. We must disciple them and ground them in the word of God. (Sunday School).

We live in a world that responds to "sound bites" rather than in depth reporting. Most people's attention span is just not that long. (I lost a lot of you at the creeds.) So when it comes to church, our attitude is, "Forget doctrine and bible study, that's boring, just give me some pointers for successful living." The problem is, those pointers won't see you through the storms of life and they won't keep you from being deceived. You need to be grounded in the word of God! That includes knowing the doctrines of the faith. But the only way to get the word into your heart and life is to read and study it! We need to do a better job of teaching and discipling believers in the word of God. Give them a sound and solid foundation on which to build.

Without mature Christian teachers and mentors to disciple them, new converts and the next generation of believers will start building a faith based partly on what they read on facebook and on what their own conscience tells them and not on what the bible says! As a church we must never stop teaching the word of God. As believers, take responsibility to read and study and know the word of God. Build your life, your values, on God's word.

Paul told Timothy, **"...Stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work – which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. They**

want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.” 1 Timothy 1:3-7

Paul was telling Timothy to teach and train the faithful so they know what they are talking about. We have a responsibility to disciple believers. In addition, he was to rebuke and correct or reject the false teachers. We have a responsibility to point out false and erroneous doctrines. We need to make sure the teachers we are listening to actually know what they are talking about. Are they teaching the word of God or just their opinion? Are they just stirring up controversies rather than teaching the plain teaching of God’s word? Another reason we’ve been susceptible to false teaching...

We’ve placed greater emphasis on subjective experience and emotional response than on the Scripture. We’re Pentecostals and as such we believe the Holy Spirit is still working in and through the Church today. We believe Jesus is still speaking to his church by the Holy Spirit. We like to feel something in a spiritual sense. Consequently, there is often a greater emphasis on subjective experience than on the doctrines and teaching of the bible. We have often elevated style above substance. We give more attention to how something is delivered than on what is delivered. If we “felt something” when they preached, we bought it, even if it wasn’t the truth. We’ve been quick to accept and embrace subjective experience without comparing it to Scripture. Someone saw something in a vision or dream and now we preach a new doctrine.

I’ve had visions and dreams before, I’m not discounting those things, but there is only one standard by which we define all of our experiences and that is the word of God. The standard is God’s word. Paul wrote, **“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned.” Galatians 1:6-8** A different gospel, another gospel, is no gospel at all! It is God’s word or nothing. Our spiritual, emotional experiences are good and wonderful, thank God for every way that he touches our lives, but don’t get disconnected from Jesus and the authority of his word. Visions and dreams and revelations cannot be elevated to the level of Scripture. They don’t inform Scripture, Scripture informs the experience. Another way we have fallen into error and been deceived...

We've taken a text out of context. Often people treat the bible like it is a magical book. Open it up, find a magical formula or the promise you want for your circumstances and then claim it for your own. It doesn't matter what the verse actually says within the context – does it say what you want it to say now? That's dangerous and can lead to deception.

What do I mean? The context is the setting in which the text, the verse of Scripture, was placed. In other words, we need to look at the big picture. What do the verses around the one verse say? What is the larger point the writer and the Holy Spirit was making? What did the Scripture say to the original hearers or readers? You've heard me say, **“A text without a context is a pretext.”** Pretext means a false appearance. It may give a false appearance and lead to false teaching if we don't examine the context. It's why I tell you to bring your bible.

Let me give you a couple of examples. The bible says, **“Beloved I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth.” 3 John 2.** People, especially the prosperity gospel preachers preach this verse as if it is a message from Jesus to the church, that God wishes above everything else in your life - above all things - that you would be physically healthy and materially, financially prosperous. “The bible says above everything God wants you to be healthy and wealthy.” That's not what it says. Look at the context. John the elder wrote this as a prayer and wish for his dear friend Gaius. Look at the context as we read it again from the NIV. **“To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.” 3 John 2.** It's not an unconditional promise from God for all of us nor is it a doctrine for the church, it is a greeting, a salutation from John to Gaius. It's a wish. “I hope this finds you enjoying good health and the blessings of God in your life.” I'm not saying God doesn't want to bless you, I'm saying that you can't build that doctrine based on this particular verse. Avoid deception and error. Know the context.

Here is another example. A Christian filmmaker posted a quote from Luke 4:7 on his facebook page and said, “type Amen if you agree.” The text reads, **“So if you worship me, it will all be yours.” Luke 4:7.** Within minutes he had hundreds of “amens” from Christians, people saying “thank you Jesus”. The premise is, if you love Jesus and worship him, he is going to give you everything you want and more. Some hyper faith preachers teach that. Health and wealth. The problem is, Jesus didn't say that. Check the context. Satan said that to Jesus when he tempted him in the wilderness. Those are the words of Satan. We should know the

difference! A text without a context is a pretext, a false appearance. Know the truth. Know the word of God. It is essential to avoiding error.

Jacob Dufour, the filmmaker that posted that, now has over 1 million views of that video which leads me to the next area that leads us into deception. **Media provides a vast platform for erroneous teaching and unfit ministers.** You used to know the life of the preacher. He or she was your neighbor. You were with them, shopped with them, your children went to school with their children, but now, we have platforms for teaching and preaching that anyone can use. If you have the money or the knowledge, you can purchase or secure air time. We don't know the teachers or the life they live. There are people on "Christian tv" that don't live holy lives, but they have enough money to buy air time. There are false teachers live streaming all kinds of teaching on you tube and facebook. Just because someone calls themselves a Christian, or because they say they are a pastor, or used to be a pastor, doesn't mean they are speaking the truth. The bible says, **"Test everything. Hold on to the good."** **1 Thessalonians 5:21** John writes, **"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."** **1 John 4:1** Make sure the teaching and preaching you are listening to and the authors of the books you are reading, make sure they pass the test of Scripture. Don't be deceived!

Another reason we have been deceived, **We are constantly looking for a "new revelation" or a "hidden" teaching.** Christianity has become big business and Christian ministries have become media driven. You have to have a new doctrine, a new revelations, new truth in order to sell books or videos. (Think how much money people made out of those blood moons.) Someone is always coming up with something new. "I've found this hidden discovery in the bible that has just now come to light. If you add up all the verses in Deuteronomy and divide it by the number of verses in Matthew it reveals the numerical identity of the anti-christ. And for a love gift of \$20 I'll send you my new book that explains it all." "The secret to the end time revealed in the stars." That kind of stuff sells books but it isn't the gospel.

You want to know the hidden mystery of the bible? I can show you, right now. You don't even have to buy my book or send me a love gift of \$118 or anoint yourself with my holy anointing water that came right out of the Jordan river. Here is the hidden mystery in the bible. Paul speaks of it. He writes to these born again gentiles, former pagans, in the letter to the Colossian church **"...the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is**

now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is: Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Colossians 1:26-27 Paul goes on to pray that the saints may be encouraged, “**...in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Colossians 2:2-3**

There it is. The greatest mystery revealed – Christ in you. Christ in us gentiles. Christ saving and redeeming people like you and me! The hidden treasures are found right here in Jesus! If you want to know the deep things, the deep teachings of the Bible, the mysteries and the hidden things and the new revelation, get to know Jesus! Get to know the Jesus of the Bible. It doesn't get any deeper than knowing Jesus and his great love for us. The mystery is that Jesus now lives within us! That is an incomprehensible mystery for sure and thank God for it.

Now listen carefully to what I'm telling you and don't misunderstand. **God is not revealing new truth to us today. His truth has been revealed in the word of God.** (Stay with me). We believe the bible is the inspired and infallible word of God. We believe the bible is a finished book. God isn't writing any new letters to be added to the Scripture. There are no new additions to the Canon of Scripture coming. Prophetic utterances are good and not to be despised, but those utterances are not on an equal plane with the Bible because the prophetic utterance is to be judged by the Scripture and by the church. Scripture then is the higher authority that judges prophetic utterance.

God is not revealing new truth. **God is revealing insight concerning the biblical truth he has already given us.** He is continually granting us fresh insight concerning his revealed truth. He is giving us new and fresh revelation and fresh vision as to what to do with that truth and with those new insights the Spirit is giving us.

Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus that God would grant them wisdom and revelation to know Christ better, to see the truth already given in a clearer fashion. He was asking for fresh insight into the truth that had already been revealed.

I get why we fall into deception at times. We are hungry for something real. We are a signs and wonders people. We hear the stories of miracles and we want to have a power encounter with God. We desire this so much that sometimes we run after things that are not biblical, or follow teachers that are not ethical. We get so hungry for manifestations that we lose sight of Jesus and his teaching. People get so hungry for the supernatural they settle for anything

out of the ordinary rather than insisting on only that which is according to God's word. We want to see signs and wonders, but remember those signs are only to point us to Jesus, they aren't an end in themselves. Be hungry for a move of God, but let's be hungrier for Jesus, to know him and fellowship with Him. Let's hunger for the real thing.

The antidote to deception, to the counterfeit is the real thing. The antidote for deception is Jesus and the word of God. Don't run after signs, run after Jesus. Determine that you are going to know him as he is revealed in his word. The bible says, **"Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."** 2 Timothy 2:15 Study to know and apply the word of God. Ask yourself these questions to avoid deception.

Does the teaching harmonize with the whole Word of God?

Is it consistent with the servant nature of Jesus?

Does the teacher/preacher live a consistent Christian life? Do you see evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in their life or is there a pattern of sin and compromise?

Is there integrity in their financial/business dealings? In their personal relationships?

Paul told Timothy, **"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."** 1 Timothy 4:16. It matters what you believe and how you live. For preachers and teachers, it matters what we preach and teach and how we live. We will give an account. Guard what you believe and guard how you live. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Don't be deceived.

Perhaps you've been hurt by a scandalous preacher or a false teacher or prophet. You've been taken advantage of or hurt or wounded by some of the extremes of the church. I'm sorry. I pray you will take a step of faith to begin to trust God again and perhaps even trust the church again. Allow a healing to take place in your heart and in your mind and spirit. Allow the Lord to heal and mend the wounds of the past as you move to a healthy relationship with the Lord and with the church, as you build your life on the sure word of the Lord!