

### Deceived Part 3

This is our first time to live stream our Sunday morning service so we want to welcome everyone watching us live on your electronic device or perhaps you are watching this later in the week. God bless you and welcome. This is the last in a three part series about avoiding deception. Jesus said, **“Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming ‘I am the Christ’ and will deceive many.” Matthew 24:4-5.** I want to make sure that we are not among those who are being deceived.

We mentioned last Sunday the importance of knowing the truth, knowing the real thing so we are able to discern the false when it is presented. We read both the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed last week as concise statements of doctrinal truth. Let’s read the Apostle’s Creed together. **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.**

We are declaring biblical truth. We’ve stated repeatedly, it matters what you believe and it matters how you live. Paul instructed 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** We need to guard our doctrine and our life choices carefully. We’re building our life on the doctrines and teaching of the bible. As we’ve said in the past two messages, we must be careful because there are false teachers twisting the Scripture and promoting doctrines that are not consistent with the word of God and the nature of Christ. So I want to share some basic principles for interpreting the bible that I believe will help keep us from being deceived.

Let’s start with a couple of questions. What do we mean by “interpreting the bible” and why does the bible need to be interpreted? Good questions. Thanks for asking.

In Acts 8 Philip comes across a man from Ethiopia reading the prophet Isaiah. Philip asks the man, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The Ethiopian official replied, “How can I unless someone explains it to me?” He was talking about interpreting the Scripture, i.e., explaining the meaning of the Scripture. (I’m going to quote several times today from an

excellent book written by Dr. Howard Hendricks. He taught for 60 years at Dallas Theological Seminary and wrote this book *Living By The Book*.) Professor Hendricks explains that when we talk about the meaning of Scripture, we have to be careful. For many people, and this is where false teaching can appear, the meaning of the text is found not in the text, but in our response to the text. Everyone is free to respond to the Scripture and the meaning becomes subjective (“this is what I think it says”). But if we are going to interpret the Scripture accurately, then we have to start with this fundamental principle: **“Meaning is not our subjective thoughts read into the text but God’s objective truth read out of the text.”...Howard Hendricks** We want to understand what God wants us to understand from His Word. He isn’t hiding it from us. He wants us to know his word. So we ask, what is he saying?

Why does it need to be interpreted? Can’t you just pick it up and read it? Sure. Absolutely. But understand the bible was written in Hebrew and Greek and Aramaic so unless you can read those original languages, it has to be translated for us. Then there are some cultural barriers since the events of the bible were happening in the Middle East in an Eastern Culture and in an ancient setting. There are some different literary genres in the bible as well that require us to read it a little differently. For instance, we read the book of Revelation differently than we read the gospels. “Well then, perhaps the bible is too complicated to read.” Not at all. It’s a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We prayerfully read the Bible and we find answers and insight. There are just some things we need to keep in mind as we read and study God’s word.

Dr. Hendricks mentions some things we should watch out for as we study the bible or as we listen to a preacher or teacher to make sure we aren’t deceived. Let me quickly share them.

**Misreading the text.** Make sure you are reading the bible accurately. Jesus said “I am the way and the truth and the life.” John 14:6. But if you read it as “I am one way” or “I am a way, a truth...” you are misreading the text. Jesus said “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it shall be done for you.” John 15:7 But if all you read or hear is “ask whatever you wish and it shall be done for you” you (or whoever is reading it to you) are misreading the text. Be careful and don’t be deceived.

**Distorting the text.** It’s one thing to misread the text and fall into error, it’s another to actually distort the text, to force it to say what you want it to say, in spite of knowing what the original author was saying in the text. False teachers often do this to manipulate or control those who follow them. Make sure you are accurately understanding and applying the Scripture.

**Contradicting the text.** This is what the serpent did to Eve in the Garden. “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ‘You will not surely die’ the serpent said to the woman.” Genesis 3:1-4 Satan is a liar and he will contradict the Word of God. It’s why it is so important that we know what the bible says.

Another strategy of the enemy is to use the word of God to try to authorize or legitimize beliefs and practices that are contrary to the character and nature of God. Through the centuries false teachers have tried to use the bible to legitimize everything from slavery, anti-semitism, bigotry and racism of all kinds, to certain types of sexual immorality, abortion and euthanasia. Those are things that go against God’s nature and character. Don’t be deceived.

**Subjectivism.** I mentioned earlier the danger inherent in our finding the meaning in our response to the text rather than what the biblical text actually says.

**Relativism.** The biblical text can have more than one implication for us, (we read it and it speaks to us) but it can have only one proper interpretation of its meaning and that is the “the meaning it had to the original writer.” That’s what we are trying to understand. People today claim the Scripture changes meaning over time. What it meant for first century believers, it couldn’t possibly mean that today. I’ve heard people argue that what God said about divorce in the bible couldn’t apply today because people live so much longer. People only lived to be 40 or 50 in ancient Israel but now people live to be 90. God couldn’t expect people to stay married to the same person for 70 years. Nonsense. The meaning of the Scripture doesn’t change over time. It means what God said!

Understand when it comes to interpreting the meaning of the Scripture, we all need to approach it humbly, prayerfully, studying. There may be differences in interpretation among believers. Hendricks pointed out that **“Differences in interpretation are fine as long as we keep in mind that the conflict is not in the text, but in our limited understanding of the text. God is not confused about what He has said, even if we are.” ...Howard Hendricks**

What do we do about differences in interpretation among believers? We differ about the Eucharist, about baptism, about the work of the Holy Spirit. We may differ about the meaning, the interpretation of a particular Scripture but we can still find unity in the body of Christ, in his saving grace. The saying was attributed to a German Lutheran theologian named Meldenius. Writing on Christian unity in 1627 he wrote, **“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”** In spite of our differences, in the essentials of the gospel, there can be unity

and always, charity. With that said, let me mention a couple of other simple principles for interpreting the Scripture.

**Let the New Testament interpret the Old Testament.** Paul said, **“All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”** **2 Timothy 3:16.** All Scripture, both the Old and New Testament are inspired and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, training and equipping for every good work.

However, in 1 Corinthians 10 Paul gives the New Testament believers a warning based on Israel’s past and tells us, **“Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did”.** **1 Corinthians 10:6.** Paul was referring to the Israelites in the Old Testament and in doing so gave us an example of the New Testament helping to interpret the Old Testament. That is, we understand the Old Testament in light of the revelation of Jesus and the realities of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In speaking of the ceremonial laws and regulations of the Old Testament Paul writes, **“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however is found in Christ.”** **Colossians 2:16-17.**

The reality is found in Christ. In the New Testament we see the substance, the ultimate meaning of what we call the shadows and types of the Old Testament. The sacrificial system in the Old Testament (sacrificing animals to atone for sin) is only a shadow that finds reality in the sacrificial death of Jesus, the ultimate, perfect sacrifice. The book of Hebrews, written to the Jewish people shows Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament. Jesus is greater than the angels, greater than Moses. He is the greater high priest, the greater and ultimate sacrifice, the greater covenant. Jesus is the greater and better everything. The Old Testament finds fulfillment in the realities of the New Testament. We don’t throw away the Old Testament, but we interpret it in light of the revelation of Jesus and the gospel.

**Allow the teaching passages to interpret the narrative passages.** The teaching passages of Scripture are where we get our fundamental doctrines and truths. The narrative passages are the recounting of events that took place. The stories of the Bible. (Think of narrative – narrator, narration – telling you the story.) The whole Bible is inspired by God, but the telling of the story doesn’t usually establish doctrine. Instead, the teaching passages help us understand

how we are to interpret the narrative passages.

An example would be the letters of Paul, the epistles we call them. For instance, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, are largely teaching passages. R. C. Sproul wrote, **“The relationship between the gospels and the Epistles often has been defined in simple terms of saying that the gospels record what Jesus did and the Epistles interpret the significance of what he did.” – R. C. Sproul** It may be simplistic, but it is largely true.

Here is an example of a narrative passage. In the story of the rich young ruler coming to talk to Jesus in Luke 18, the young man asked Jesus, **“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Essentially he asked Jesus, “What do I need to do to be saved?” **Jesus answered, “You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.”** The young man said, I have kept all these since I was a boy. Jesus said **“You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor...” Luke 18:18-22**

Now if the narrative passage interprets and informs the teaching passages, then I assume the way to be saved is to keep the commandments AND sell all I have and give the money to the poor. That’s what the narrative indicates. But the teaching passages tell me that salvation comes by grace through faith. The teaching passages show me that I must confess with my mouth and believe with my heart that Jesus died for me and that God raised him from the dead. So we look to the teaching passages of Scripture to help interpret the significance of the narrative passages.

**Let the systematic passages interpret the incidental passages.** By incidental, I’m referring to some of the more obscure or less significant passages of Scripture. By systematic passages we are talking about the collective truth of Scripture as it pertains to a certain issue. If something is systematic, then it has been arranged, classified or categorized in a method that makes it easier to explain and explore. Systematic theology takes Scripture and classifies it so we can study it: creation, the fall, the triune God, Christ, Salvation, the church, the end times, etc. So the systematic passages refer to the collective and collected truth of Scripture.

The danger is found in taking incidental passages and building doctrine on it. Here is an example of the importance of allowing the systematic passages to inform and interpret the incidental passages. In the book of Acts it says **“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had... There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned**

**lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.” Acts 4:32-35** The passage tells us the church had all things in common. It's the only place it appears and it occurs in the early days of the church. It is one incidental passage speaking of one isolated event. Some have tried to say this is teaching Christian Socialism or that the church should always and everywhere live in communal style where no one owns property of their own but everyone shares everything and property and money is distributed equally among the people.

The reality is, this is one incidental passage and event. We let the systematic passages interpret the incidental passages. Consequently, we don't insist on everyone living in a commune and having all things equal and no one owning property, etc. However, we do take that passage and based on the other systematic passages concerning the church as the body of Christ, we recognize the principal of meeting one another's needs and helping one another.

One more example. The passage in **Daniel 10:12-13** speaks about a vision Daniel has that involves Michael, described as one of the chief princes who came to help fight against the prince of the Persian Kingdom. Some have used this to build a theology of demons, angels and spiritual warfare based on this one incidental passage. The problem is there are few systematic passages to back this up. There are books on demons and angels that classify their ranks and name them, but there's just no scripture to back all that up.

The New Testament teaching on spiritual warfare is found in the systematic passages. They point us to put on the whole armour of God so we will be able to stand, to resist the devil, flee temptation, to intercede in prayer. Be careful and allow the systematic passages to interpret the incidental passages. In a similar way,

**Let the universal passages interpret the local passages.** The local passages are those that seem to deal with an individual or a specific event. The universal passages are those that are applied in every situation. They give us a universal guiding principle.

An example is found in Acts 5:15. The bible says miracles were happening as the apostles prayed for people. At one point the sick were lined up on the street so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on them, hoping they would be healed. That is an isolated event. It is a local passage. Does that mean we ought to lay the sick outside on the sidewalk this morning and arrange it so the elders of the church can have their shadows pass over them? Even Jesus making mud out of spit and putting it on the blind man's eyes was a one time event. A local

passage. It's not wise to establish a methodology for praying for the sick from a local or incidental passage. Most people wouldn't want to be prayed for if they had to lay on the sidewalk or if we were using spit and mud on them. The universal and systematic passages tell us how to pray for the sick. According to the New Testament Scriptures, we lay hands on the sick, we call for the elders of the church to anoint the sick with oil, we pray the prayer of faith for the sick. Let the universal passages interpret the local passages. Most all of this is just good, common, biblical sense but it will help us as we apply them to our study of the Scriptures.

Let me sum up. Don't be deceived. Watch out for those who distort the plain meaning of a text. Look at the things that are emphasized often in Scripture. Look at the themes that are repeated, the things that are related. Look at the things that are consistent with the character and nature of Christ. I've often said it so let me repeat it: **Remember, the plain things are the main things and the main things are the plain things!** Here is a principle to remember, typically, most often, **It means what it says.**

This book isn't a magic book, it is God's word to us, filled with power and history. It is the story of redemption. It is for us today. Let's receive it as the Bereans did in Acts 17:11. **"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." Acts 17:11**

Read it. Ask questions. Use common sense. Apply it. Guard it. Live it! **"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** If you do, you won't be deceived and God's word will enable you to stand strong in every circumstance of life.