

Do Not Be Deceived

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What is there to Deceive Us?

The Bible warns that there is the possibility to be deceived. Let's look at some of the key things that the word warns us to watch out for.

The Lawless One

There is a Lawless (Loveless) One coming that the scripture warns us about.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (NIV) ¹ Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. ³ Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? ⁶ And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷ For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish

because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie ¹² and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

So, at a very specific time the antichrist will be revealed and will deceive many. How?

Spirit of Lawlessness

This spirit is already at work, before the antichrist himself is revealed. It reveals itself through LOVE. But this is love for just about everything except God and the Truth. It is a self-consuming, false love. Later we'll see in more detail how lawlessness and loveless-ness are synonymous in the teaching of Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:1-9 (NIV) ¹ But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God-- ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. ⁶ They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, ⁷ always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth--men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. ⁹ But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

Counterfeit Miracles, Signs, and Wonders, and Every Sort of Evil

This man will not just be evil; he will have a type of power through the work of Satan. These miracles, signs, and wonders will be very convincing to a certain group of people, and you don't want to be found in that group.

What is that group of people? Those who refused to love the truth. This is discussed more later on.

False Doctrine

The Bible also warns us of two types of false doctrine that we need to be aware of, and not be deceived by. They are doctrines of devils and doctrines of men. We'll look at each of these in greater detail, but I'll share what I think is a simple definition of each from the context that we find them in when reading the scripture.

Doctrines of Devils—Doctrines inspired by demons that are taught by men to deceive and mislead people for the purpose of turning them away from Jesus Christ and the faith.

Doctrines of Men—Doctrines that usually come from men making up their own rules and regulations for how the scriptures are supposed to be lived out in our lives. The true deception in this is that they always lead to self-righteousness rather than a reliance on the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

With that said, let's look at some scriptures about each of these, and then delve into the common characteristics that they share for the purpose of learning to recognize them.

Doctrines of Devils

Paul warns Timothy about doctrines of devils or demons.

1 Timothy 4:1-8 (NIV) ¹The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ²Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. ³They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. ⁶If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. ⁷Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

So, it is clear that in the last times there will be doctrines of demons that are taught through hypocritical men for the purpose of deceiving people. We need to be aware of and watch out for these doctrines.

Doctrines of Men

Jesus sternly rebuked the Pharisees for their doctrines of men that were a burden to people and kept them out of the Kingdom of God. Also, Paul later warns us of the deceitfulness of these doctrines having an appearance of wisdom.

Matthew 15:7-9 (NIV) ⁷You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."

Matthew 23:13-25 (NIV) ¹³"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. ¹⁴¹⁵"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. ¹⁶"Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' ¹⁷You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? ¹⁸You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' ¹⁹You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. ²²And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. ²³"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ²⁴You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. ²⁵"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

Colossians 2:16-23 (NIV) ¹⁶Therefore 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. ¹⁷These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. ¹⁸Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his

unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. ¹⁹ He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. ²⁰ Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ²¹ "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? ²² These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. ²³ Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

So, the scripture makes it clear that there are many ways that an attempt at deceiving us may come, but this is in no way an attempt to make us worry—it is to make us aware and to equip us.

How Do We Recognize False Doctrine?

Both types of false doctrine, doctrines of devils (or demons) and doctrines of men, can bring deception, destruction, and death. How do we recognize these types of doctrines?

Both have very similar characteristics to them:

- First and foremost, they defy scripture or twist it in some way.
 - All scripture is good for doctrine

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV) ¹⁶ All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.
 - Not all doctrine is good
 - If that is the case, then what must doctrine that is not good oppose or disregard? The SCRIPTURE.
- They become unbearable and unreasonable to men.

Matthew 23:1-4 (NIV) ¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ² "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³ So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴ They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

 - Jesus said his yoke was easy, and his burden is light.

Matthew 11:29-30 (NIV) ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."
- They close the Kingdom of Heaven to men rather than open it up.

Matthew 23:13 (NIV) "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

 - John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus' disciples all taught one message very clearly: "The Kingdom of Heaven is very near to you" or "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."
 - False doctrines will have just the opposite effect. They will make people feel that the Kingdom of Heaven is hard to obtain and out of reach.
- They often neglect the **main** and **plain** things of scripture, to emphasize less central themes in scripture.
 - For example, they may focus on a single out-of-context scripture while ignoring the more important things like Justice, Mercy and Faithfulness.

Matthew 23:23-24 (NIV) ²³ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters

of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ²⁴You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

- They become a superficial cover-up for sin
Matthew 23:25-28 (NIV) ²⁵"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. ²⁷"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. ²⁸In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.
- They lead people away from Christ
Matthew 23:15 (NIV) "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.
- They are a source of **great pride** to those who keep them.
Matthew 23:5-7 (NIV) ⁵"Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'
 - Contrariwise, those who keep the doctrines of Christ very closely and successfully tend to exhibit just the opposite: **great humility**.

How Do We Avoid Being Deceived?

Wrapped up in all these scriptures about the source of deception are the keys to avoiding it. Let's look at those and also some other practical advice for how to avoid deception.

How do we avoid deception?

- By Loving the Truth.
2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 (NIV) ⁹The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, ¹⁰and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.
 - More than our doctrine
 - More than our favorite teachings or teachers/preachers
 - More than our favorite ministry model
 - More than our favorite song
 - More than our favorite worship music
 - More than our favorite book
 - More than our life
Revelation 12:11 (NIV) They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.
 - What is the Truth? The truth is a man—Jesus Christ
John 14:6 (NIV) Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
 - The antichrist is called "the lawless one" in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2.

- According to the teachings of Jesus, what is lawlessness? Being Loveless.
Matthew 22:35-40 (NIV) ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."
 - So, it makes sense in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 that we are told those who were deceived by this lawless or loveless one is because they did not have a love of the truth. We must love the truth more than anything. We must love Jesus!
 - By discerning our own hearts.
 - We must discern if we are drawn to a teaching by the Holy Spirit or by our own itching ears.
2 Timothy 4:2-4 (NIV) ² Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.
 - If there is a sin that you love so much that you want to find a teaching to justify it, you will find that teaching. And you'll deceive yourself into believing it is the truth.
 - There are teachings to justify almost every idea and practice that you can think of, and most of them use scripture in some twisted way to do it. These are doctrines of demons.
 - By being open to rebuke and correction from the body.
2 Timothy 4:2 (NIV) Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.
- Galatians 6:1 (NIV)** Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.
- Proverbs 27:5-6 (NIV)** ⁵ Better is open rebuke than hidden love. ⁶ Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.
- By practicing spirit-led self-reflection.
Psalms 139:23-24 (NIV) ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.
 - We must have fellowship with the Holy Spirit.
 - I would venture to guess that very few of us could claim to never struggle with lack of prayer. However, we must be encouraging each other to pray. You cannot get what you need in your walk with God by going to church and listening to people sing and preach to you. You need fellowship with God that comes through prayer and studying the word.
 - By accepting open rebuke from the Lord.
 - The Lord may give you a dream, vision, or word in your heart to correct you. Listen and watch for these.
 - By accepting Change with Truth.

- Don't be closed off to things changing, because that can keep you from being set free from any deception that you might be in now. However, only accept change if you see that it agrees with the truth of the scripture--not just because someone presents a compelling argument.
- By not looking for "NEW" revelation.
 - Orthodoxy isn't something to be avoided.
 - Look for understanding of scripture, not a new impressive way to present it. This is especially a temptation for young ministers.
 - We absolutely should seek and pray for a spirit of Wisdom and Revelation, but this is not to have a "UNIQUE" understanding of scripture--it is to KNOW JESUS--the living word of God.
Ephesians 1:15-18 (NIV) ¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints
- By not thinking you are beyond the capacity for deception.
1 Corinthians 10:12 (NIV) So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

Proverbs 14:12 (NIV) There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.
- By not trying to interpret everything as a prophetic sign.
 - This one is a little touchier, because God DOES and CAN speak to us through anything that he wants; however, some of the loopyest and goofiest beliefs I have encountered have been from people that think everything is a prophetic sign from God.
 - This is actually more akin to superstition than prophecy.
- By not attempting to codify good advice.
 - In other words, don't turn good advice into a written law because these become the doctrines of men.
 - Even Paul made sure to point out when he was speaking his opinion or speaking by concession, and not by commandment, when he gave some instruction about marriage.
1 Corinthians 7:6 (NIV) I say this as a concession, not as a command.

Conclusion

The scripture makes it clear that not only will deception come, but we also have the capacity to be deceived. Therefore, let's learn to recognize deceiving doctrines and put into practice scriptural steps to avoid being deceived.