

Preventing Deception

How Not to Be Deceived

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These days we are almost in constant contact with advertising. Have you ever noticed that? It is on radio. It is on our TV. If we go outside and we drive, it is on billboards. There are signs that people put in their yards, and along the highways, to tell you that such-and-such a subdivision is here. Or they tack some kind of poster, or whatever, on a telephone pole to tell us that there is a handyman who wants to come out and fix your house. People emblazon their businesses on the side of their vehicles.

You go on the Internet and you are pretty much assaulted by advertisement. We get advertisements in our e-mail, and then we get advertisements in our mailboxes. You cannot avoid it. If you go out in the woods and traipse around in the wilderness for a while, then if you look around you have advertisements on your clothing and on all your gear. You cannot get away from it. There is advertising everywhere!

There is a problem with advertising; and most of you probably know of it. I will give you an example. I have been having some problems with the stability of my Windows operating system at home. So I decided to check around for a good utility to solve some of these problems. Lo and behold, one advertisement gets sent right into my inbox on my e-mail. As I look at what it says, it is this glowing review of this software utility product that works "better than any other software product" because it does not work in Windows. Rather, it kind of works outside of Windows, and so it has a better chance of fixing Windows problems.

I thought, "Wow! This is exactly what I need. It's the safest, most robust, most complete software package yet—to fix *Windows* fault problems." So I put down my money, and I downloaded the product. I installed it in my computer. And it did not even work. I could not get the thing to come up! Not only did it not fix *Windows*, it did not work itself!

This "wonder product" might have been something else for you: A detergent that did not take out stains, or a tool that broke the first time you tried to use it, or a car that was just junk (and you will never buy one of those again). It could be anything. The fact remains that its advertisers sold you 'a bill of goods.'

One of the problems with advertising is that it is based—in a large part, in this day and age—on **deception**. They are willing to lie to you, one way or another (whether it is a "white" lie, or a shading of the truth, or just out-and-out fraud), about their products so that you will buy it. You will spend your money and be disappointed (that is the way it works out) too frequently.

But slick marketing, a pretty face, phony reviews, pressure to buy, or whatever it happens to be (some other deceptive tactic) will deceive us (if not having already done so, in the past). But now that you know, from painful experience, that that product does not work—you are never going to touch the stuff again.

The process is similar for spiritual things. Theological ideas, doctrine, and philosophies are *marketed* these days the same way as other products. Maybe not with the "glitz," but some of the same methods are used to get us to quit believing what God has given us to believe—and to believe what some man has decided is "the truth."

The proponents of these ideas (false doctrines and what-have-you) always put them in their very best light. They make grandiose promises of how this is going to change our lives for the better. They produce examples. And sometimes they will even produce testimonials about how certain things are "so much better."

In the Worldwide Church of God, there was one man who used *Greek logic* to try to convince all of us. There were dozens of things that he used to confuse the people of the church about certain doctrines—particularly the Trinity, the nature of God, and those sorts of things. He had an impressive resume, and people believed him! He was a good salesman for false doctrine. It was unfortunate that there was somebody there to do that, and to deceive so many people. But it worked, and many were deceived.

Another thing that they also do when they promote these false doctrines is that they *hide the downsides*. You know that about products. Do they not always give you the side effects of drugs in really itty-bitty fine print—so that you cannot read it, or your eye will go over it? Or, if you are getting a vehicle, all of the financial information is explained in garble. You must hear it a couple of times before you can even begin to understand what they are actually telling you. That is, all the things that you need to know legally that gets them out of any kind of 'fraud' for deceiving you.

That is what happens on spiritual arguments too. They hide those. They brush over them. They get through them really quickly, and distract you with something else. It all works the same. Man's approaches to falsehood do not vary too much.

So, what is the antidote? How can we prevent being deceived? How can we make sure that we will not follow false doctrine because some slick person has 'marketed' a false idea to us?

If you remember my last sermon, it was about our willingness to believe. This *willingness to believe*, if taken to an extreme, could make us gullible. It could make us easy targets for Satan and his "angels of light"—as it says in II Corinthians 11. We need to know how to prevent deception. Remember that I mentioned that there were two sides to the issue. Yes, we have lost our credulity; and we need to regain it. But, on the other end of the scale, there is the danger of being very easily deceived *if* we are too gullible.

So I am going to balance that other sermon on "Willingness to Believe" with this one on "Preventing Deception." We must be willing to believe God; but we have to be always on guard, so that we are not drawn away—enticed away—from what is true. Jesus told us, "You must be wise as serpents, but harmless as doves." And that is, basically, these two sermons in a nutshell. *We must be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*

We especially need to understand how we can prevent deception because we have been promised—assured—so many times in the Scripture that, as the end-time comes and gets going, these *deceptive pressures* are going to increase. We will go to Matthew 24 because this is a good place to start to show that this is, indeed, what is happening in these times.

Matthew 24:24-25 [Jesus says:] "For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand."

Increasing deception will mark the "end time." At a certain point, these deceptions are even going to be augmented by signs and wonders—miracles of certain kinds. Whether they are true miracles or not, we do not know. Satan has the ability to do certain things of that nature. But they will *seem* to give some kind of credence to these miracles, and to the ideas of the people who are doing them. And, if we are not careful, even the elect—if possible—could be deceived.

This phrase—"if possible"—has made some people wonder, "Can the elect be deceived?" Well, it is kind of a trick question. If they are deceived, then they are not *the elect*. But "the elect" do something that keeps them from being deceived! It is not like God says, "Okay. Here's this one group. I am not going to let them be deceived." That is not how it works. They are the elect *because* they will not allow themselves to be deceived.

So it is not possible to deceive the elect. Do you understand my point? It is not because these people have a special "safety net" around them, so that they cannot be deceived. They cannot be deceived because they will not let themselves be deceived. That is why they are "the elect." They are working hard so that they will not be deceived. And that is the group that we want to be in.

Hang on to this phrase that is verse 25. "See, I have told you beforehand." That is very important. Just hang on to it—because, in a way, that is how we keep from being deceived. Christ says, "*I* have told you so beforehand." That is why these elect will not—cannot—be deceived. But we will not know who those "elect" are until the end, when we find out who was not deceived. (At least, that is the way I look at it.)

Let us go to Romans 16. What we are beginning to see is that we have a large part in not being deceived. We have to put our all into it so that we are not deceived. This section contains warning, instruction, and comfort concerning deception.

Romans 16:17-20 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. [This is one of the major verses on disfellowshipping.] For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. [Sounds like advertising, does it not?] For your obedience has become known to all [meaning, the Romans' obedience]. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. [That sounds very similar to what Jesus said: "Wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."] And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

This section begins with disfellowshipping because it is a biblical means of dealing with brethren who are deceiving (or, who are trying to deceive) others. We often talk about disfellowshipping people who cause *divisions*. Well, any kind of deception will cause divisions. That is just the way it works. After a while, people do not believe the same things as the rest—if they have been deceived.

These people who are disfellowshipped (who are causing divisions and offenses) are doing things contrary to true doctrine. So, he says that we must avoid them. This is part of the effort and the diligence that it takes to keep from being deceived. We must especially avoid them in situations where they have the opportunity to influence our beliefs.

Now, if you meet them on the street and you do not get into a spiritual conversation, a very polite social "Hello" would be fine. But you do not want them getting into doctrine. You do not want them getting into any kind of argument or discussion about the truth. You keep that away from yourself because that is part of our effort to keep from being deceived. We just do not let it even touch us, if we possibly can, because we are supposed to be keeping ourselves pure spiritually and physically. But we especially do not want false ideas to get into our head and start doing their dangerous work.

Paul says that such people, who are deceiving the brethren, are serving not God, but their own belly. This may sound like all they are doing is trying to get food, or whatever. If we take it on such a simple level, that they are trying to feed themselves—or maybe make money, or trying to "live off of" the saints—I guess you could take it that far physically. But what it means is that they are *stoking their own desires*. It is a code word, a symbol, of a person doing something for his or her own gratification.

They were doing it to please themselves in some way—whatever it happens to be. They are not doing it to please God, obviously, because if they were doing something to please God, they would be telling the truth. But since they are telling falsehoods and lies, deceiving the brethren—causing divisions—they are obviously not pleasing God in any way. And so they must be doing it for some personal reason, some way to gratify themselves. And it could be anything. It could be a vanity trip where they are satisfying their own mind, or their own pride.

Because what they are saying is contrary to what God teaches, he goes on to say here that they have to use smooth words and flattering speech. Or, we could say "plausible arguments" and "a neat turn of phrase." They used deceptive methods like we mentioned with advertising. And some people can do this without even knowing that they are doing it. They couch things in such a "nice" way that it makes it sound good.

And before we know it, we are thinking, "I don't know. He could be right. He's such a nice guy. I had him over for dinner one time; and he just regaled us with stories. He always thanks you, and he compliments everything you do. He's just such a great person. And, you know, I can't understand how such a nice guy could be saying anything that is 'bad' because he's so 'good.'" So we start to thinking, "He might be right!" And before long, we are taken in. He has used smooth or flattering speech. He has come across well. He dresses nice, or what have you. And his arguments seem like, "Sure, that could be—if you look at it from this particular angle."

So, as it says here, *the simple* are taken in. This means *the innocent*—those who are not looking for evil. They are guileless, and they think everybody else is as guileless as they are. They are harmless, like doves. They do not

see 'bad' in anyone. ("Oh that Adolph Hitler, he sure had a nice smile, didn't he?" That sort of thing.) These people are innocent, guileless, harmless, simple (in a certain way), unsophisticated—where they are not looking for the 'bad' in anyone.

That is how we are supposed to be, are we not? Do not a couple of the qualities mentioned in I Corinthians 13 about love talk about this very thing? That we are not looking for 'bad' in other people. That we are willing to believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. That is why we are so gullible at times—because we do not have that core of steel in our beliefs, but we have kind of softened it into a core of marshmallow (or pillow), so that we are easily bent in the wind. But we need to be wise as serpents—and at the same time, simultaneously—harmless as doves. Paul's advice comes in verse 19.

Romans 16:19 I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.

Once you break this down into practical terms, this means that you **do** what is right and have nothing to do with what is wrong. We are "wise." Wisdom has to do with how you *act*. It is very practical. Knowledge is mental. Understanding is mental, and spiritual. But wisdom is both of those things, as well as physical. It is what we *do*. It is what we *say*. It is how we go through life.

If we walk in wisdom, then we do not trip; and we should not be tripped by anything that would come along to make us stumble. Paul said that we should be wise in what is good—meaning that we *do it!* It is wisdom to do what is good.

But we are to be *simple* (He uses that word again.) concerning evil. This is a related word to the same "simple" that is in verse 18; but it is not the same word. It does not exactly mean the same thing. Remember that word in verse 18 meant innocent or harmless, guileless, or unwary. That is, those who do not look for evil in others. But the word in verse 19 means *pure*. Maybe a better word would be unadulterated, unmixed. That is why I said that, when you break these things down to their simplest terms, what Paul is saying here is "Do what is right, and don't do what is wrong." Have nothing to do with it.

But if you mix up a little 'evil' with 'good,' what do you get? You get *human nature*. You get what we have been all of our lives. Is that not what happened in the Garden of Eden? She took the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; and it produced this. Paul says, "We're not supposed to do that! We've had enough of that. What we need to do is to do what is good and have nothing to do with what is evil. We are looking for the Tree of Life—which is all 'good' and no 'bad,' no evil."

The advice is very simple, very easy to understand, very basic; but that is how you keep from being deceived. *Have nothing to do with evil!* That is, as much as you can. Have that "willingness to believe" and keep evil, at least at arms length at all times. Then you will be down the road a little bit at keeping yourself from being deceived.

So, if we want to sort of sum this part up, *do not dabble with questionable beliefs*. Do not dabble with them! Do not consider them! If you possibly can, avoid them at all costs. "Stick to the trunk of the tree." (Have you not heard that one before?) That means do not skitter out along the branches where only the squirrels can safely go. Do you understand? The twigs! Do not hang from a twig, or you will find yourself on the ground—and not even on the tree any more.

Another way that we could put it is *stay away from the edge of the cliff*. If you get too close to the cliff, you might fall off. And if there is an earthquake, you will fall off! There are some things that are out of our control. If we are at the edge of the cliff and something big happens, we might not have a handhold. We would go over the edge and be lost. So the smart thing is to stay as close to the side of the mountain as you can—away from the edge of the cliff—and hang on for dear life; and never let go. Stay away. Do not even think about the evil, as much as lies within you. Stay away from it. Avoid it.

Paul says to *avoid even the appearance of evil*. That is how far we are supposed to stay away from it. Not just if we are doing evil or thinking evil, but even if somebody might come along and think that what we are doing is evil. Try to stay away from that.

Paul ends with the comfort that God will put away the evil—and the Deceiver—soon. So we only have to do this for so long. But as long as we have to do it, let us do it. Let us have that "core of steel" for as long as we need it. Then we will be given strength—in the resurrection—to do it all the time, because we will *BE* good. God is that way. We will have developed the character to be that way, all the time, ourselves. God cannot even be tempted by evil. That is what we are looking to become!

James 1:12-18 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life [That is our goal.] which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

We might say, "There are so many temptations out there. The whole world is evil. How do we avoid them?" Well, James gives us some ideas here—some hints, clues, and instruction. First he tells us that *we will face temptation*. We cannot avoid it. Deception, evil, will come looking for us. Especially so, because we are God's children; and Satan is looking to devour us (as Peter said). So we will be the targets of onslaughts (plural) throughout our Christian lives. We have to be ready to face temptation! But, if we get through it, then we reach our goal—the Kingdom of God, where we have a crown of life waiting for us. We have that assurance and faith in what God has promised us.

Then James goes on and says, "God doesn't tempt us." God cannot be tempted, and He does not tempt us. He stays away from that sort of thing. He neither does it, nor has it done to Him—because that is how God is. But he says that we are tempted when *our desires* lure us away. The process can then pick up, if we are not strong enough—leading to sin, and ultimately to

death. I am talking about the second death—not just physical death. We can be deceived right out of our crown—if we are not careful, if we are not strong. (As I mentioned before, this is a similar process to modern advertising. It works the same way, because the same "spirit" is behind it.)

Then James says, in verse 16, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren." This is a clue to me that what he has just told us tells us something important about not being deceived. It is like a summation of what he has just said. And so there must be something in what he just said that is going to help us to not be deceived.

He tells us that God never entices us to accept His way by promising to satisfy our physical desires. That is what I got out of that. It says that we are enticed when our desires lead us to sin. But he had just said that God never tempts us. So, if you put those two thoughts together—it is that God never tempts us to follow our physical desires, for self-gratification.

Now, you might say: "Whoa, wait a second. Doesn't He promise us long life? Wouldn't that be a physical desire, to have long life? Doesn't He promise us health? Doesn't He promise us, in certain places, prosperity? And that our enemies won't overtake us? Didn't He promise us all of these things?"

But have you also noticed what it is that He also says when He makes those promises? In almost every occasion, He says, "*If you will keep My commandments, then I will. . .*" (Give you long life, prosperity, safety from your enemies, health, or whatever.) There is always *a condition* that He puts on it. "*If you keep My commandments,*" *then* such-and-such and so-and-so will happen.

Now, what does this tell you? I will tell you what it tells me. It tells me that many of these things—if not all of them—happen because that is how they are designed to happen. Sure, there is a certain amount of intervention that He will do, in order to work out His purpose. But, like a law of the universe, *if you keep God's commandments then* certain things are going to result.

If you keep God's commandments, you will probably be healthy. If you keep God's commandments, you will live a long life. What does the first

commandment with promise say? If you honor your father and your mother, then you will live long in the land that the LORD gives you. It is $A + B = C$. What is it that the Bible calls it? You will reap what you have sown! It is cause and effect. So, if you keep the commandments, then there are certain blessings that just automatically accrue to you.

Oftentimes, because God is working with us so closely, He does not give us the fulfillment of those promises to their extremes. He will give them to us *as much as we need them*—or, as much as is within His purpose at the time. He is working something greater for us than just satisfying our physical wants or even needs.

What is it that James says next? The next two verses give you a clue to all of this. He says (1) God gives good gifts, and He never changes. His good gifts are always the same. And in the next verse, (2) that He has made us a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. So put those two ideas together. What does God give good gifts for? To make us His children! That is always what He is thinking about. That is His whole method. His purpose is focused on just that.

It says here that He calls us and converts us by His truth for the purpose of making us His children. All of His gifts are "good gifts." They never change. They are always geared towards this end. Right? All of His gifts are gifts for our ultimate spiritual good—to make us like Him. That is what He gives good gifts for. *Blessings* (if you want to put it down to its basic point) are a byproduct of His way—because the ultimate blessings, the good gifts, are all leading towards your entrance into the Kingdom of God and not the satisfying of your physical desires.

So, how can we apply this? If we understand that God is going to give us what is good for us and what will advance us towards the Kingdom of God, then what does that say about false teachers? How can we avoid the deception? Do we get a clue here? The clue is that if anyone tries to sell you a belief in which *your physical desires* are going absolutely to be met, then you have a very big clue that it is *false*.

God is not going to use that tactic. God is not going to say, "Follow Me, and you will have a good life. Everything is going to come up roses for you." No. What does it say? We can find scriptures all over: Those who are trying to

get to the Kingdom of God will suffer persecution. Does that sound like "the good life" to you? "Ho, ho. Persecution. Let's have it!" No. God does not necessarily tell us that we are going to have the good life.

How is it that we get through this life? By lurching from one trial to the next! Is that not how we are refined? By fire! By trial! By going from one problem to the next problem, and overcoming it. I am sorry to lay that load on you, but that is just how God's way works. The best way to produce sons of God is the same way the Son of God achieved His glory. Remember the way that Hebrews 2 says that Jesus Christ won—through **suffering**.

So if you get a person telling you that you can have the good life if you will just follow this aberration in the doctrine, then you have got a clue—that it is *not* of God. God does not promise us the primrose path. He promises us trial and suffering and persecution and even martyrdom for some. What does God say? The angels rejoice when the saints die. That should give you a clue that this way of life is not what people might think it is.

God is not interested in this life except for what it will produce in the next. This life is *a training ground*. When you train, you go through the paces. You are in a regimen. You hurt. You work. We are not to the competition yet, where you allow yourself to just "do it." (That "competition," let us say, that we are working for is the Kingdom of God.) Right now, we are in training. And no athlete worth his salt lounges and plays and lives the good life while he is in training. So there is a clue to how to avoid being deceived. When something is "too good to be true," it is probably not.

Let us go to Deuteronomy 11; and we will go through this next point fairly quickly. In a way, it is a corollary to what we just saw.

Deuteronomy 11:13-19 'And it shall be that if you earnestly [diligently] obey My commandments [Remember what I said about the promises of God.] which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.' Take heed to

yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you. Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children. . .

Deuteronomy 11:22-24 For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do—to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him—then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours.

Deuteronomy 11:25-28 No man shall be able to stand against you; the LORD your God will put the dread of you and the fear of you upon all the land where you tread, just as He has said to you. "Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known."

Did you notice that? It kind of backs up what I said earlier, when we were in James 1. You get *blessings* if you do what is right, and you get *curses* if you do what is wrong. It is a law! That is the way it works. You will reap what you sow. This idea is repeated multiple times in Scripture. It is in the New Testament too.

Now notice verse 16. It gives us another clue in preventing deception. He says, "Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived." What does this tell you? *Take heed to yourself*. This means pay attention! Take care. Guard yourself. Watch out for yourself. We cannot just skip our way into the Kingdom of God. It is going to take a great deal of effort.

We have got to *watch*. Does not Christ tell us to do that? "Watch and pray always." But He does not say to watch just world events. One of the things that we have to watch most closely is *ourselves*.

"Take heed to yourselves"—what you are allowing yourself to do; what you are getting involved in; who your friends are, how much time you are spending on this, that, and the other thing. How close is your relationship with God? That is what you have to watch and take heed of.

God wants us to jealously protect our spiritual growth. Once we develop a trait of godly character, never give it up! Watch yourself. Take heed to what you are doing. Guard that eternal life that has been built within you—by God's grace, and your yieldedness.

Most of the time (I would say it probably happens in four-fifths of the cases, and maybe even more.) people become deceived because they are not watching what is going on. They are just in "la-la land." Something hits them right upside the head and they follow it because they have no strength. They have not been watching themselves.

God's way requires *constant vigilance*. "Watch and pray," Jesus said. Our guard has to always be up against deception. We have to have our antennas out making sure that what we hear is true. Thus, if we become deceived, whose fault is it? Is it God's? Or, is it ours? God says, "Take heed to yourself." He has shown us the way to live. He has revealed it to us. He has not left anything hidden that we need to know. So whose fault is it if we get tripped up? We are not going to be able to accuse God of it. So who is left? We are.

Let us go to I Corinthians 3. Here is another way to be deceived.

I Corinthians 3:18 Let no one deceive himself. [This is not somebody else deceiving you, but you deceiving your own mind.] If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

That is kind of funny. Paul says, "If any of you think that you know something, forget it. Make like you know nothing. And if you do, you just might become wise." He goes on to explain why.

I Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. . .

As wise as we might think we are, we do not even have a candle type of light as to what God's light is like. God's light shines like the sun. Our wisdom is barely a flicker. So do not think that we are smarter than God in any way.

I Corinthians 3:19-20 . . . For it is written [Paul says], "He catches the wise in their own craftiness." [People with this human wisdom will think themselves right into the second death.] And again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

They are absolutely useless. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. That is how far away it is from God's wisdom.

I Corinthians 3:21-22 Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours.

This is what has been laid up for you. So, become fools—so that you can be wise. We are working for "all there is." Do not let your own *arrogance* and your own *foolishness* (really, when it comes down to it and not "wisdom") trip you up. You are Christ's, and Christ is God's. You have been set apart for something far greater than to get tripped up by human wisdom, which is not worth a hill of beans.

Godly reason has a logic to it that *man's reason* cannot attain. It does not understand it. They are incompatible in many ways. Some things just do not sound reasonable, do they? Is it reasonable for you, every year, not to eat leavened bread for seven days in the springtime? Is that logical? Not to a man. "What good is this going to do me? This is hard bread. I can't butter it right. It doesn't taste good with anything. And, bread. You know, what's this

going to teach me?" A man's brain, with all of his wisdom, cannot figure out why God has us to eat unleavened bread for seven days in the springtime (starting on the day after the Passover day).

It does not make sense [to man]. But to God it makes perfect sense. And to those who He has given His Spirit, it also makes perfect sense—because it teaches us something that is going to put us into the Kingdom of God if we continue in it. That makes sense! So, if we are working solely on human reason, then we miss the boat altogether. The wisdom of man and the wisdom of God are poles apart. If we want to be smart, we had better make sure that we are wise on God's end and not on man's end. If we are wise on man's end, He says that we are deceiving ourselves. So do not trust your own reasoning. If God says it, then do it! God says it. We do it. We believe it. We understand it. That is the order—and not the other way around.

John 8:30-32 As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

John 8:42-47 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

This is a very interesting section of Scripture. It could be expounded for hours. But this is *the* main point of how we prevent deception. You may have thought that what we have gone over so far is important. This is the most important—right here. It has already been mentioned a few times, but I will dwell on it for a few minutes.

Christ mentions it three times here. (1) He says, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (2) He says, "You are not able to listen to My word." And (3) He says, "He who is of God hears God's words." So, what is the point? *The truth, as revealed in God's Word, is the key element to preventing deception.* The more and the better that we know God's truth—the more obvious deception is.

I could also say that the more and the better that we know God's truth, the more we avoid anything that is evil. It just does not "live" where we live, because we are trying to do the truth. If we **do** the truth, then we do not have time for evil. They are opposite, like things that repel one another. They are like oil and water. They do not mix. It is really that simple. If you know the truth, then you should be free from deception.

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

That is very simple. God's Word is a lamp. It is a light. And it illuminates the darkness. If you are walking through the woods at night, it is awfully nice to have a torch or (for those of you who are not English) to have a flashlight. It is nice to have some light around so that we can shine it on the ground—so that our feet do not hit a snag in the path, or tumble over a rock or a boulder that may be there. That is what light does. It *illuminates*. It *reveals*.

God's Word illuminates the path of our lives. If we keep God's Word shining on where we walk, then we will not trip. We will not be deceived. Because we are following the light, we will see what the light reveals. And if we are following the proper path, then we have done well. It is only when we turn the light off (before we have actually arrived at our destination) that something could spring up in the dark, and trip us up. So, if we keep the light of God's truth shining very brightly ahead of us, then we have a greater chance of avoiding deception.

John 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was

made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

What poured out of Jesus Christ while He was here? Words, God's Words. They are spirit, and they are life. What are God's Words, in total? The truth! The truth that makes you free. Where does the truth lead? To eternal life! Put all of those things together; and John just shortens it: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." How to get to the Kingdom of God? By following God's Words—the Light.

John 1:5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

The "darkness" has nothing to do with the light. Like I said, they do not mix. The "light" and the "dark" have nothing to do with one another! What happens when you have darkness and you add light? The darkness disappears. What happens if you have a light and you add darkness? The darkness disappears. Darkness cannot stand before light. *Deception cannot stand before the truth!* If you have God's words and you shine them on falsehood, the errors become glaring.

John 1:9-10 That [Jesus] was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory. . .

Is that not interesting? What is glory to most of us? A bright, radiant light! "We beheld His glory." We still behold His glory—right here, in the Book. That is the glory of God. His way, His truth, Him—because He is *the truth*.

John 1:14 . . . the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

It just blasted out of every pore of His body. Every fiber of His being glows with the light of truth. I get the impression of someone standing backlit by

the sun and there is just radiance coming out from him. But it is more than that, because He does not need to be backlit by the sun. It just pours out of Him. I cannot even find a word to describe it. He just *shines* by the truth.

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

That does not mean that what was in the law was not true. He is just saying that grace and a complete telling, or revealing, of the truth was made through the Mediator—Jesus Christ, our Savior. He put the capstone on it, and finished it, and revealed it to us.

So whatever does not agree with the truth is false, or it is unprofitable. It does not matter a hill of beans. Whatever is false will not lead to eternal life. But it does lead to the second death, and we do not want to go there! Once we see that "the light of truth" has illuminated something to be false, we drop it. We get away from it, as fast as we can. Do not let those things linger.

If you have gotten information from somebody—let us say a pamphlet, a booklet, a book, a write-up of some sort, a letter—and you determine that it is false, then throw it away. Do not let it sit around where you can see it again. It is for your own protection.

Most of us have heard how the U.S. Treasury Department trains its agents. Their primary job is to find counterfeiters and to recognize counterfeit money. How do they do that? Do you think that they put all of their agents in a room, and they start passing around counterfeit bills; and they say, "Look, see what they did here? They put a squiggle, instead of a straight line." Or, "You see how they put Benjamin Franklin's picture on this twenty, instead of Andrew Jackson's?" That is not how it works.

The U.S. Treasury Department, to train their agents to recognize false currency, gives them the real McCoy; and they study it. And they study it, and they study it, and they study it. And they study it until they know every line, every shade of color, every word, and everything that is on both sides of our currency—in any denomination. They know how it feels. They know the dimensions perfectly. And they can tell at a glance, because they *know* the truth, what a false bill looks like.

These agents are so in tuned with their "truth"—which is U.S. currency—that they know false currency at a glance. They can say, "Oh, yeah. No doubt about it. This is false. This is counterfeit." Now, other men have become very good at producing counterfeit currency; but the U.S. Treasury agents are still ahead of the game—because they concentrate on the truth, and not on the false.

That is the way that we have to be with God's Word. Let us see this in II Timothy 2:14. This whole section concerns doctrinal disputes and how to take care of them. Paul is talking to a minister here—Timothy. The first century church faced the same sorts of doctrinal error, false teachers, etc. that we do. Well, maybe not to the same extreme; but I am sure that in places they did face it pretty regularly, fairly deeply. And so Paul had to tell Timothy how to stand up to these people.

II Timothy 2:14-16 Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

All that arguing—all it does is increase to more ungodliness; and, boy, have we seen that in this day and age. The more arguing you get, the more trouble it causes.

II Timothy 2:17-18 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

We have not had to face that one; but, evidently, the first century church did. Paul's instruction here is pretty simple; but it works every time. There are three points here. First he says, "Do not get into useless arguments" over details, ticky-tacky points, minutiae, (he mentions here) over word definitions. Mr. Armstrong told us to *never* produce a doctrine based upon the meaning of a Greek word or a Hebrew word. You always have to have

the Bible behind the meanings of words. They are helpful to understand points, but do not get deceived by the way one scholar happens to translate a certain word. The Word of God—the truth—is not based on minutiae. The Word of God is based on GOD, and that is nothing small.

God gives overall principles, and we have to learn to use them. The minutiae is important—in a certain respect. Details are important. But if the Bible clearly shows that the overall workings of a doctrine are such-a-way, and you come up with one scholar (out in the boondocks somewhere) who has been laboring over one Greek word for thirty years and finally comes up with something that turns the whole doctrine *upside down*—discard it! Let us not get into arguments over words. See what God's light is shining on the path brightly lighted, and do not get distracted by "a firefly" over here—or some other thing that does not make a bit of difference.

Second: He says, "Be diligent to do the things that please God." I know that the *King James* says, "Study to show yourself approved." And *study*—meaning, reading your Bible and studying it—is part of what he is talking about here. But it is not all of it. Study here is not limited to just reading and studying the Bible. What he means is *make every effort* to show yourself approved to God. We should be concentrating our entire lives on that. We have to concentrate and work hard so that our actions, our words, our thoughts, our plans, and our reasoning please God.

Paul says, right here, that we have to *be diligent* at it. We have to consciously work to do this. We have to be diligent. We cannot slack off. If we slack off, then we are going to be like the Hebrews who were letting their salvation slip through their grasp. So he says, "Don't be like that!" Press every effort into making God pleased with your progress. If we are doing that, do we have time to be deceived? Not a whole lot—because we are sticking our noses in the truth, and doing it. When we do that, the falsehood cannot bear it; and it runs away. It makes us **wise** in God's way of thinking.

The third thing that he says here, at the end of verse 15, is that we need to *rightly divide God's Word*. This is a term that many people have talked about what it means. It means, "cutting a straight path." But it can also have the idea of cutting something like a cake.

Let us say that you have four or five members of your family waiting for a piece of cake. Now, you want to eat the whole cake at one sitting; and so how do you rightly divide that cake—so that each person not only gets a share, but everyone gets a proportionate share. A little baby does not need as much cake as big Daddy. (That is the way it works at our house, at least. And Mommy does not need any, so that is another piece for big Daddy.) But that is what this means.

It means looking at a thing and figuring out how all the pieces work together.

Let us look at how it works with God's truth. He has given us His complete, revealed way of life. His truth is right here, in this Book—the Bible. And that is all we need to know to attain salvation. This is all the information that He has made available to us; and it has His stamp of approval that it is His information. And if we use this properly, then we will be in the Kingdom of God—provided that He has called us. Right?

Somebody might think that and not be called, and they live a fairly good life because they are following God's way; but if He has not called them, then their time is coming. They would have made a very good start on things when He finally does call them. But this has been presented to us. And what we have to do with this whole Bible is to *rightly divide it*—so that we give each part of our lives the proper share.

Let us say that we are going through marriage. A lot of us do that twenty-four hours a day all of our lives, from about age 22 on. Well, God has provided enough instruction in His Word that if we follow it, and take that Word and proportionately put it to use in our every day lives, then we are supposed to have a pretty good marriage. We will then use our marriage to be a stepping-stone in learning God's character and, ultimately, in being in God's Kingdom.

But you notice that there is not one chapter, or one book, in the Bible called "This Is The Book Of Marriage." What do you have to do? You have to go in there and divide the sections on marriage out from the rest of the text, do you not? You have to go out there and cut it out and see what God says about marriage.

That is what Paul tells Timothy that he has to do. He has to go in and make proper application of the truth. That is how we could paraphrase this. "Be diligent to present yourself to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, making proper application of the word of truth." But that means that you need to *know it*. So the "study" comes in. We know it, and use it; and any deception that comes up we will be able to recognize and vanquish.

Let us finish then in John 17. This was Jesus' final prayer, before being arrested.

John 17:14-15 "I have given them Your word [the truth]; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. [You see—once we have the truth, we are different; and then we become targets.] I do not pray that You should take them out of the world. . .

Jesus said, "They need to be in the world, and they need to be targets because that's how they grow. They need to learn what is true (from the false) and to follow it." But He does say to His Father:

John 17:15-17 . . . but that You should keep them from the evil one. [That is, keep the attacks down to a point where we can handle them. And that is what God has done.] They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

While Christ was on earth physically, He protected His disciples personally. He was their Guard. But He left us, and them, the Word—God's Word (in all these 1,400 pages). It is our protection against the deception of Satan, against false brethren, against false teachers. God's Word sets us apart. And, yes, that does make us a target. But God's Word also provides us with the weaponry to fight back.

That is what it says in Ephesians 6:17. We have been given "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word [truth] of God." That is what we fight with! When deceptions come, we say, "Ah-ha." and we unsheathe our weapon. And we say, "On guard. We can foil you, with the light of truth." That is our protection.

We have *the shield of faith*, because we are willing to believe; and we have *the sword of the Spirit*. Those are the two things that will help us to make it to the Kingdom of God. So if we really know the truth, and we believe it, and we keep it—then we will be free from the ravages of deception.