

Our Trusted Source Of Truth (Part One)

We Are Surrounded By Deceit

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We are going to start in John 18:37-38, and there is one phrase that I am very interested in. The situation is Jesus before Pontius Pilate.

John 18:37-38 Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, “I find no fault in Him at all.”

In response to Jesus declaring that He bore witness to the truth, and that everyone who is of the truth hears His voice (meaning that they listen to Him and they follow Him, doing what He says and instructs), Pontius Pilate immediately asks Him, directly and succinctly, “What is truth?”

Immediately—that is the central meaning of that phrase, “And when he had said this, he went out again”—as soon as he had finished saying the words, he was turning and going to the Jews, and telling them that he had found no fault with Jesus.

We are going to look at this passage, “What is truth?” This question, more particularly, because it is instructive to consider this little exchange that they had. Only John includes it in the Gospel, so it makes it interesting in light of when John was writing it. He was writing at the time when the church was under severe attack from false teachers, so he includes this little episode so that we can think about it.

Clearly, it is a very simple question. It is literally in the Greek exactly what it is here in the English—What is truth? Unlike Pilate, who leaves the question unanswered, John wants us to ask that question ourselves, and find an answer to it, and make sure we reach a conclusion on it.

Before we go into the conclusion, I want to consider the situation and the players a bit more. Jesus was on trial for His life. He had been condemned by the Jews for blasphemy. Yet He was brought up on charges of rebellion against Caesar. The reality, the truth in this situation, is that Jesus was an innocent Man. He had been railroaded by

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the Jews on trumped-up evidence, and accused before Pilate of sedition, which was not the charge that they had found Him guilty of. There was no evidence at all that there was any sedition in the Man, and of course there was not. He was innocent.

So the whole situation in which Pilate asked, “What is truth?” is a farce. It is a sham; it is a miscarriage of justice. Everything in this situation is built on lies.

We have the two main players. Jesus is the embodiment of truth—just think about it. No falsehood ever passed His lips. It says in one place (not in the Gospels), that God is not a man, that He could lie. So being God in the flesh, He did not lie. He never misrepresented Himself before others. He was always very upfront about who He was and what He was saying. He never misrepresented other people. He never played the hypocrite, saying one thing and doing another. He never even shaded the truth to make Himself look better. He was always very honest and truthful about what He was about, and what He was teaching.

So here, where He says that He bears witness to the truth, we could say that He was the witness to the truth. God had given Him a message, and He bore witness of that message in every word and deed that He did. He was the perfect witness of living a life of truth. So He was a witness to the truth, in word and deed.

It would be no theological stretch to answer Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” with “He’s standing right in front of you.” You want an answer to that question? Just look into His eyes, hear His voice, watch what He does.

Just the evening before, when He had been speaking with His disciples, He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” meaning that if you looked at Him and did what He said, and followed His way, followed His actions, He would lead you to eternal life, because He had the truth, and He was the truth (that is in John 14:6).

The other side of the coin is Pilate. He is the other player in here, and what is Pilate? Pilate is a Roman politician, a Roman prefect. He was the governor of Judea. So right there, we see his stance on truth. Is not “honest politician” an oxymoron? He had played the game for many long years. He had risen to high office in the empire. It is no small thing for a person to be made the governor, even of a backwater place like Judea. So he was fairly significant in the Roman political hierarchy.

He may have been involved though, as all politicians in great empires are, in intrigue, back-room deals, shady practices. Being a prefect meant that his post was primarily military, so he was involved in military actions, in war, and obviously, right here in this

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very situation that we are looking at, he is involved in a trial that would end in the execution of a man—of the Son of God.

I do not think that it is a very far stretch to say that he was the recipient of bribery, graft, and many other of those kinds of unpleasant activities that swirl around politicians and political office.

Just knowing the general way of things in this world, we would have to say that Pilate was no lily-white choir boy. You do not get to a position like that by being a good person, by being innocent. You do that by “climbing the ladder” in any way possible. He was a sinner, who had made his way through life, and up the Roman hierarchy, in the Roman government, by hook and by crook, just like any normal human being would do to get ahead. It is said that he ran afoul of Caligula just a few years later, probably about a decade later. He ended up in exile, and he killed himself, committing suicide.

So a thoroughly human, carnal life was here, in direct opposite to the perfection of Jesus Christ, and the embodiment of truth.

So Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” And that is all we have, he asked Jesus, “What is truth?” and then he turns around and goes and tells the Jews, “I find no fault in this man.”

So he says, “What is truth?” and that is all we are given. But *how* did he say it? That is the big question. Ever since it was written down, people have wondered, how did Pilate say this? What was the tenor of his voice? What was he implying, by using those three words? Did he say it sincerely, was he truly seeking for an answer to the question? Probably not, because if he had truly sought an answer to the question, he would have stood there and waited for Jesus’ answer—but that is not what we get. We get, “What is truth?” and then he turns around and goes and tells the Jews. He is not really seeking an answer.

Did he say it sarcastically, thinking that Jesus must be just another rabid Jewish zealot, a religious zealot? But it does not appear so, because the very next thing he said is “I find no fault in this man,” meaning that He had committed no crime.

So it seems, as we see here, that Jesus’ replies to his questions, once he started talking to Him, were very clear and very thoughtful. They were also very gentle, in a way, in terms of not being threatening. He had said that His servants would fight, but it was not His time. His Kingdom was not from here. What He was telling Pilate is that He was not in direct competition with Rome. He was not a rebel. He was not seeking to overthrow

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either the Roman government, or the Emperor, or even the local government. He was an innocent man. His designs were not political, is what He was saying.

Pilate, saying, if this is all there is, then there is no case against this man—"I find no fault with Him," was not saying "What is truth?" sarcastically, because he had generally had a pretty good impression of Jesus. He was not a zealot, He was not a raving lunatic, demanding Pilate's head or whatever. He had a mission that was not a political one. So he was not being sarcastic by dismissing Jesus' words about what truth was.

But did he say it impatiently and dismissively, as if "What am I doing here? This is just a sham; the Jews have put you up to this, got me out of bed early in the morning for nothing, just to hear religious babble from this man." Again, that is not likely, since it appears that Jesus' measured words had convinced him that He was not even an ideological threat to Rome, which would have been the case had Pilate considered His religious views to lie outside of what Rome sanctioned.

Rome sanctioned the Jews. That was basically the only other religion that you could legally have, other than the state-sponsored religion. They allowed the Jews to practice, and seeing what Jesus had to say, he did not see anything outside the norm. It was just the Jews bringing forward another Jew. So everything seemed fine. This man might have a little bit different take on things, but it seemed to be alright.

My own conclusion is that Pilate asked, "What is truth?" in a rather cynical and world-weary way, conveying a sense of futility about ever finding an answer to the question. More like, "Here you are talking about truth. What is truth? How can you know truth?" It was like he was telling Jesus, "Look. I haven't just fallen off the turnip truck. I've been to the best schools in the Roman Empire, I've had the best teachers. I learned my history, I learned my literature. I've been all over the Empire in my career, going here and there with the legion, here and there in my appointments. I've seen people all over the Empire. I've seen Gauls, I've seen Germans, I've seen all of these people, even Jews. And they all believe something different, they all say what they believe is the truth, and here you are, you're just coming up with another idea that *you* think is the truth—What is truth?"

He knew that the religions all over the Empire were vastly different. There were gods of Rome and Greece, which were essentially the same, with different names. There were Egyptian gods, there were Edomite gods, Ammonite gods. There were Persian gods, there were German gods, British gods, and there was the God of the Jews, and many others. So there was a multiplicity of belief out there, and how could any one man come to know what was the truth?

Besides, at this point in Roman history, a lot like today, the majority of Romans, especially the ones that got higher and higher in the government, were dyed in the wool secularists. They really just gave lip service to worship of the Emperor, and lip service to the gods of the Romans. Maybe their god was Caesar himself, maybe it was the Empire, maybe it was their own ambition. That is how they looked at things, that the pagan gods were not really real, they were nothing. The only thing that was important was what was going on right now with the person, with the individual.

He might have thought, "Who's to say which one of these gods has the truth, which religions have the truth? Maybe it's not just the religions, maybe we should throw the philosophers in the mix. Did the Platonists have the truth? Did the Stoics, or the Epicureans, or anyone of the other philosophies, is that where the truth was?"

He may have thought, "Is truth even knowable?" That is probably where he had come in his own mind, that there was so much information out there, so many differences of opinion, that you could not know what the truth was. He might even have come to the conclusion that truth varied from individual to individual. One's truth is not another's truth.

He had judged enough cases, enough criminals had come before him to know that even when you brought eyewitnesses to the same incident, that they gave differing stories. Even though they had seen the exact same thing, maybe from a slightly different perspective, they still could not agree on what the truth was about even a physical incident, of thievery or murder.

Maybe he thought, we all shape our realities to suit ourselves. Our truths are just what we want them to be. We even go so far as to lie to ourselves to make things agree with the way we want things to be. We want to have whatever we hear, any kind of news or new information, to fit our own preconception. So we turn them or twist them to make them seem acceptable to us.

Perhaps thoughts like these did flit through Pilate's worldly-wise skeptical mind. I imagine that being in the position that he was in, he had a hard time with the whole concept of truth. He had seen no evidence of it in his life. He had been too far down the road to believe that truth was even possible.

It is clear that I want to talk about truth today, but I also want to talk about deceit. This subject keeps coming back to mind, and it has obviously been coming back to my dad's mind because that is essentially what he talked about. It keeps coming back to mind because I believe that it is our most urgent problem as we live in the world and as we

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continue on in the church—figuring out what is true, and what is false. Being able to discern between the two.

I believe that our convictions about the truth will be tested in the months and years ahead, because like Pilate, this world has essentially shrugged its shoulders and declared truth to be an open question.

The standard, maybe even simplified, post-modern thinking and teaching about truth in general is that, in absolute terms, truth does not exist. They have so thought themselves into a corner on the idea of truth that they have essentially thrown up their hands and said, “There is no truth.” They maintain there are definitely no absolute truths, that is, no eternal verities that are applicable to all people at all times.

So where we would say the Ten Commandments are always applicable to everyone, no matter what time of the earth’s history that you lived, they would say “No.” They might agree with some of them, but they would not agree with all of them, certainly not the first four.

If the individual believes a thing to be true, it is true, but only for him. He has no right to expect anybody else to believe it, and he certainly has no right to force his truth on anybody else, because your truth may not be applicable to that other person. Some people take it to the extreme that some people’s truths should not be taught at all, and of course, one of the primary organizations or groups that should not be taught is Christianity. People think it is not good to be taught, because it teaches absolute truth, and “there is no such thing,” so it should not be given any ear.

So truth is entirely subjective to such people who believe this post-modern way. They say that truth only applies to the individual and to the particular situation that they may be in, and not to all people, and certainly not at all times. Truth can change.

If truth can change, then it is not truth. Do you see how pernicious an idea this is? Unfortunately, as my dad mentioned, our young people are being fed this in American secular classrooms all the time. Unless they have a good foundation already, they are likely to come away from higher education, from whatever schooling they go to, with a very dim view of anyone, or any church especially, that claims to speak the truth. They believe that things like Christianity, and people who believe in the Bible, are relics, dinosaurs. They are people that are a holdover from the past, and therefore, they are delusional, that they believe in something that is so absolutist in its teaching.

In Jesus’s Olivet prophecy, what He says right off the bat is what I believe is one of the

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most pivotal passages for us right now:

Matthew 24:3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

So we get the setup here; the disciples want to know about the end time. "What's it going to be like when You return?" They are asking essentially the same thing with each question, because the end of the age is when Jesus Christ would return. So they are saying, "What's it going to be like then?"

Matthew 24:4 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you."

That is the first thing out of His mouth.

Do you want to know what it is like in the end time? You want to know what it is like before His return? Well then, be careful that no one deceives you, because that time is going to be an environment of deceit, of deception, of falsehood, or lies, of trickery. When people believe anything and everything, where they teach anything and everything. They shout it from the mountaintops. It is all over the place, and you have to be careful.

Look at this, He does not stop there:

Matthew 24:11 "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many."

Matthew 24:23-24 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."

Matthew 24:25-26 talk about if somebody says "Christ is here!" or "Christ is there!" do not believe it, because they are trying to deceive you.

Throughout this Olivet prophecy, Jesus is sounding an urgent warning about a major characteristic about the time leading up to His return, that it would be a world of

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deception. It would be full of religious and cultural dishonesty and fraud. The purpose of that is to deceive the elect. The purpose is to ensnare and destroy the people of God. That is why this time is one of deceit.

We have to be alert to this, because we live not just in the information age, we live in, and I am going to coin a new phrase here, in the *deluge of information age*. We are being flooded with it. It is overwhelming. It is coming from every direction. It has every sort of belief in it that you could think of, and we need to be alert to the fact that all of these ideas—philosophical ideas, cultural ideas, intellectual ideas—whether the people who are spouting them know it or not, they are all designed to trip *you* up. Behind them is Satan the Devil, who has deceived the whole world, and he wants to deceive us.

You can believe that what Jesus says about the Great Tribulation, that if it were possible, even the very elect would be deceived—you can believe that Satan sees that as a challenge. He is going to put God to the test, to see if He can actually protect His people.

So what do we have here, as the time gets closer to Christ's return, but a deluge of falsehood, of ideas that lead *anywhere* but to the truth. Satan has taken up the challenge, and he is aiming at you. He wants to trip you up; he does not care how. He does not care what morsel you bite on, and say, "Umm, this is nice! Let me have some more." All he wants to do is make sure that morsel leads you away from the truth of God's Word, and away from the Kingdom of God.

This has been told us, we have been warned about this from the very beginning, and it continues throughout the Scriptures. We are going to take a bit of a survey, and I have only picked out certain warnings. Genesis 3 is where Satan deceived Eve, so the theme of this chapter is Satan's deception, what he has done.

In Genesis 3:4, Satan lies blatantly, totally contradicting God, who had said in the previous verse that if you take of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the midst of the Garden, that you shall surely die, Satan says to Eve, "You won't surely die." He directly contradicts God here.

Genesis 3:13 And the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The morsel was so good looking—"it looked like it would be great to taste, and so I ate it, and I was deceived."

And what did it do? What did this deception lead to? Separation from God. It led them out of the Garden, because God would not abide sin. He pushed them out of the Garden so they would not come back and take of the Tree of Life, and they were separated from God.

Let us go forward to Psalm 52. It is one of those psalms from Book II that we went over, a month or two back.

Psalm 52:1-3 Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually. Your tongue devises destruction [Notice what he goes after first, the tongue.], like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. You love evil more than good, lying rather than speaking righteousness. Selah

People love to lie, they love falsehood, they love saying something that deceives people and turns them off into another direction. Why? Because it is good for the person who is saying the lie, for his own benefit. He is going to get something out of it.

Psalm 52:4 You love all devouring words, you deceitful tongue.

So we get something here from David, the fact that this is the way that people are—the wicked out there. They are using deceitful words to gain for themselves, and they are very willing to cut you down to get it.

In Jeremiah 9, Jeremiah is weeping about the way things are going in Judah. Remember that Jeremiah was prophet during the time of the end for Judah, so he is describing how people are at that time. It is a parallel to the way things are going to be at the end time, at the end of Israel, the Great Tribulation.

Jeremiah 9:2-6 Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for travelers [He is saying, "I wish I could get away."]; that I might leave my people [He did not like what he was seeing, he wanted to take it away from before his eyes because it was so abhorrent to him.], and go from them! For they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. "And like their bow they have bent their tongues for lies. They are not valiant for the truth on the earth. For they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know Me," says the Lord. "Everyone take heed to his neighbor, and do not trust any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbor will walk with slanderers. Everyone will deceive his neighbor, and will not speak the truth;

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they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves to commit iniquity. Your dwelling place is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know Me,” says the Lord.

So Jeremiah and God paint a picture of a society that is built on lies. Everybody is doing it, everybody is participating. You cannot trust anyone, not your neighbor, not your brother, they all have some kind of angle. If they have to run over you to achieve whatever they want to achieve, and do it by lies, they will do it, because they have a treacherous heart and a deceitful tongue.

If it happened in Jeremiah’s day, at the fall of Jerusalem, it will certainly happen in our time, too.

We are going to another situation, in Daniel 8, which is a type of what is going to happen in the time of the end. Starting at verse 23, it is the end of the time of Greece, but it is applicable in type to the Beast, because it is speaking about Antiochus Epiphanes, I believe, but it also applies to the one that we call the King of the North.

Daniel 8:23-24 “And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes. His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; he shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; he shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people.”

That is really the key there, that he is being led or pushed by Satan to destroy the holy people. So the target is on us.

Daniel 8:25 “Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; and he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes [which is Jesus Christ]; but he shall be broken without human means.”

A key part of this man’s whole agenda is to make deceit prosper. He wants lies to be flying all over the place. He is probably the starter, the source, the beginner of many of them, because if he can keep these lies going, he can control people—and that is his aim. To control, overwhelm, to dominate, to rule, and to be victorious, to have everyone under his thumb. So again, another end-time prophecy tells us that deceit is going to be

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the name of the game.

Let us go to the “man of sin” section in II Thessalonians 2.

II Thessalonians 2:3 Let no one deceive you by any means [This is Paul telling us the same thing that Jesus did, “Take heed that no one deceive you.”]; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first [Meaning a lot of people are going to be trapped in the lie.], and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.

Another warning that the end time, when that man of sin stands up, is going to be a time when we need to have our belts buckled, our “loins girded” as Peter said, and that we are very careful about what we choose to believe.

I Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

Many are going to leave the truth because the deceiving spirits are out there, teaching demonic things. If we are not careful, we will believe them. We will be caught up in them, and they will take us away.

II Timothy 3:13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

So we have another warning that as time goes forward, people will rise up, impostors who are making themselves appear like angels of light, making themselves appear like they have truth from God. They are going to be deceived themselves, and they are going to deceive many. And it is going to get worse. It is not like there is just one here and one there. At the end time, as we have seen with all of this evidence, it is going to be a time of all-out deception.

I John 3:7 Little children, let no one deceive you [Remember, this is right at the end of the first century. He gives you a clue about how you can help yourself to know whether someone is deceiving you or not.] He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

He is telling you that one way to find out whether someone is telling you the truth is to look at him: is he practicing righteousness like Jesus is righteous? Is he copying Jesus Christ, who as we found out, is the embodiment of truth? If someone is following God's way in the practice of their life, then we have a better chance of being able to believe what comes out of their mouth. It is not a totally sure thing, but if you can look at somebody and say, "He practices what he preaches, and what he practices is what God taught," then we can be pretty sure that the person is teaching something that is good, and right, and true.

Revelation 12:9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world [Notice, that is in the present tense.]; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

"Who deceives the whole world." He started with Eve in the Garden, and he has never stopped. He is still doing it. One thing I want to point out, he does not care whether everybody else in the world is deceived, too. He just decided to deceive everyone. He does not care whether they are on his side, he does not have any good feelings toward them. He will go ahead and deceive them and hope they die. He does not care about any men, and that is why his target is on you, because you, having God's truth and God's Spirit, are the only ones that matter. The rest of them are easily deceived. We will see in a little bit, that *only you have a defense against him*. Everybody else out there is easy pickings, "fish in a barrel," to Satan the Devil.

Plainly, this is a theme that goes through the entire Bible. We went from Genesis to Revelation, and many places in between. So we have to be very careful that the ideas that we allow ourselves to believe are actually true, and not just *seemingly* true, or *just sound so good*, or because that they are something popular out there, something that is going around, in a viral video, or something that has been shared 5 billion times on Facebook.

Just because it is out there and just because people believe it, does not mean that it is right. But people get swept up in things like that. "Oh, wasn't it wonderful what this person did for the returning soldier? OK, it might have been a wonderful thing. But, I'll just let it go." We have to think about these things. Is this what God would have wanted? In that particular instance, no. He would not have sent the guy over there in the first place. It is a stupid war.

Just think about war, just for a minute. Do you know what people think about war?

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Whether people should go to war? Do you know that it is all over the place? People believe all kinds of things about war, and they will go to the Bible to justify themselves about war.

Now, God has told us not to go to war. He says He will fight our battles for us, that we should trust in Him. But you know, the churches, especially the Protestant churches, the Evangelical Protestants, are all for war. They have come up with a very long, and for them, very logical explanation of what a “just war” is. It is easy to look at “just war” theory and say, “Yeah, that makes sense. It’s probably OK if we go over there and kill a million Iraqis, or a million Afghanis. It’s a good thing that we go over there and do this, because they’re evil, and we’re good, and they’ve done this to us, which contravenes this one tenet of the doctrine of just war, so we have justification for going over there.”

Do you know that almost no one, ever in the history of the world, has ever followed God’s decree or teaching or desire on war? There are a few examples in the Old Testament. Jehoshaphat gathered his army. God told him to take his army out there, because he was making a show of things as a witness. But when the sun came up, they found the battlefield before them, and God had taken care of things, because Jehoshaphat and the high priest at that time had decided they would let God fight their battles for them. That is one of the few times in the whole history of the world where that actually happened.

That is God’s view, and it is so easy in something like this—I just pulled this illustration out of my head—just about any subject you want to think about, you can see how men have twisted the ideal that God teaches into something that makes them feel good, and that they can accept.

As my dad said in his sermonette, we have to analyze everything that we hear, and see, and read, to make sure that it is correct, and right, and good. We have to put it side-by-side with God’s Word and say, “Where is this right? And where did it go off the track?”

We have to be an analytical people. I am sorry if you have not been educated to be an analytical person; our educational system in this world does not teach people how to be analytical. There are some that do, but most do not. Most of our educational system is designed for people to be presented with a curriculum, and just spit it right back at the teacher. Whether they accept it or not is not something that they are expected to do, they are just supposed to be able to write down the answer that the teacher wants. They are not trained to take the text and run it through a series of questions, “Is this right? Is this good? Is this true? What would God say about this? What scriptures apply to this?”

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We have to train ourselves to do that, and especially today, because, what did Jesus say? “Take heed that no one deceives you.” What did Paul say? “In these times, imposters are going to get worse and worse, so don’t let anyone deceive you.”

I am not saying that we should be fearful; I am not saying that we should be manic about this in any way, or even depressed about these things in any way. I am just saying we have to learn, we have to train our minds, to think God’s thoughts about whatever we see, and read, and hear.

This all has to go through a sieve, and the sieve is God’s Word. If it actually comes out the other side, we can trust it, at least to the point as far as we can. We really need to be studying into God’s Word so that we know how to evaluate these things.

What I am saying, essentially, is that we cannot accept anything from this world at face value—and I do not expect you to take what I say at face value. You should run it through that same process.

II Corinthians 11:1-4 has a background that runs all the way from the beginning of I Corinthians, and it runs all the way through the letter because of the Corinthians’ own particular problems. One of the things that Paul is dealing with in Corinth was false teachers who had come among them, and were turning them away from the truth.

II Corinthians 11:1-2 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

He felt a fatherly feeling for these people, that he had brought the truth to them, that he had been instrumental in their conversion, and that he was bound by honor and duty to bring them to Christ eternally. He had to shepherd them to the Kingdom of God.

II Corinthians 11:3-4 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

Or you may gladly receive it. Paul is rightly concerned that the Corinthians are being

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unduly influenced by these false teachers. Although the Corinthians thought of themselves as sophisticated and very canny in their ability to think things through, they were actually favorably inclined to accept what the false teachers were saying. The false teachers, in studying them, knowing their personalities and characters, had figured out what they needed to say to make them believe. So they gave them falsehoods that they would readily accept.

One commentator called this favorable inclination a “facile acceptance of novelty.” Do you understand what Paul is telling us there? These false teachers had figured out that the Corinthians were susceptible to believing some nice, new shiny thing. They were like birds: they found something shiny in the grass, and they just cannot stay away from it. These false teachers had figured out that if they give something new, something that seemed really juicy and interesting, that the Corinthians would just gobble it down, and they would think it great, and they would think themselves wise.

So they had this facile acceptance of novelty. The facile acceptance part is that they did not give it very much thought. They easily accepted it, they just gravitated toward it because it was so new and interesting. They did not go through that evaluation process.

What was going on in Corinth does not fit our situation exactly, but it is close enough that we can take the sense from it. I hope we are past the point that some new thing does not get our attention that easily. But I guess there are some people who do like those shiny new things, and will grasp onto them without thinking.

Remember, we got a hint of this back in I Corinthians 1:27, because Paul had said that God had not called the wise and the great of this world, but He called the foolish and the weak. So these people thought that they were a lot better upstairs than they actually were. They were really foolish, like a silly bird, going and tinkling all of that nice silvery stuff with his beak. That is how they were, to these false teachers.

It seems that the Corinthians in particular had a penchant for tolerating things that had a show of wisdom. Remember in the situation where the man was having incest with his father’s wife? They thought that they were showing love by keeping him around. To them, they thought that they were wise, showing love and helping this sinner remain in the church. Paul said, “Hey! Kick the guy out, we don’t need that kind of sin among us! It’s making a bad example, and you are actually puffing yourself up with pride in the way that you are dealing with this. It’s not good, get him out of there. He can come back later, if he repents.”

Which is what happened, showing that Paul’s way was actually the way that worked and

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brought him back to Christ, rather than their way, which was leading more and more people away from Christ. That was the “show of wisdom” that they were having, and it was wrong.

By the time of II Corinthians 11, they had repented of this, because the man had been accepted back among them. But they still had the problem of being susceptible to deception. The false teachers were continuing to prey on them, and they were making inroads into them by undermining their faith and by teaching ideas that again, seemed so wise—because they were complex and they were esoteric.

Do you know what the word esoteric implies? It implies a knowledge or a wisdom that only a few can understand, or that only a few are asked to come and understand.

The false teachers were working on their show of wisdom. Remember, they were foolish, but they thought that they were wise. So they would make all of these complex explanations, and if they grasped it, they thought “Oh wow! I must really something, very intellectual, nobody else understands this, just me, because it has only been revealed to those few.” The false teachers were playing on the pride of these people, deceiving them wholesale.

At this point, we need to remember Jesus’ warning in Matthew 24:24, where He said that if it were possible, even the very elect would be deceived. The deception of the end times is going to be intense.

It is already intense. The Internet has intensified the deception like you would not believe, or maybe you do believe it. The lies, the falsehoods, the false teaching are flying at us full speed, and a lot of them seem logical and right.

We have to be very careful. Without God’s protection, which He promises in Matthew 24:24 by saying “If it were possible”—we would be totally susceptible, like the Corinthians were susceptible to those false teachers. That emphasizes to us how close we need to be to God at this time, as we move forward. He is our sole protection from this flood of misinformation that we are getting all the time.

It is an onslaught, and we need His armor. Remember what Paul says in Ephesians 6. We need that, but mostly we need a relationship with God. That is the big thing that is going to allow us to see deceptions and avoid deceptions.

Let us figure out what is going on. The phrase in II Corinthians 11 that stands out when you read that passage is “the simplicity that is in Christ.” That was what they were being

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forced away from with these deceptions.

When you use the word *simplicity*, it makes it seem like God's way is easy, uncomplicated. You can even give it the nuance that it is even foolish or dumb. We call people who are not very bright, simple. They are kind of dumb; they do not have it all going up there.

But that is not what Paul means here. The word in Greek is *haplotes*, which is literally *singleness*, or you could even say *wholeness*. That comes a lot closer to what Paul meant. When you take it away from just its literal meaning, it can imply sincerity and purity, and even rectitude and uprightness. I even saw it in one place rendered as *holiness*.

Translators say that here in II Corinthians 11 that it could be translated as “from the simple goodness that is in Christ.” Both ideas are there, the idea of singleness, as in simple, meaning it is not all that complex, and goodness, in terms of rectitude and righteousness. They put them together and made it “simple goodness.”

Paul also uses it in:

II Corinthians 1:12 For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.

If you have the New King James, the margin has, next to *simplicity*, “the opposite of duplicity.” Is that not interesting? That simplicity means the opposite of duplicity.

Duplicity is deception, but it has a shade of meaning that is interesting. Duplicity, with the root *dupl* in it, means *double*.

Whereas simplicity—*haplotes*—has to do with singleness, duplicity has to do with doubleness. As it has come down in our language, duplicity is deception by speaking or acting in two different ways to different people, concerning the same matter. It is double-dealing, it is speaking out of both sides of your mouth, it is saying one thing to one person, and another thing to another, or it can be hypocrisy by saying one thing and doing another.

This helps us to understand what *haplotes* means in II Corinthians 11:3, in the simplicity

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which is in Christ. Remember, singleness versus doubleness. When you have doubleness, you take the singleness and you split it apart. What does that imply? It implies that you no longer have a whole. You have two. So the word that I think works best in II Corinthians 11:3 is *integrity* or *wholeness*, which is the one that we saw at the beginning when we were going to this verse.

Paul is concerned that the people were being driven away from the integrity which is in Christ, or the wholeness, or the “whole ball of wax,” as it were, that was taught.

What does this imply to us? Paul implies, by saying this to the Corinthians, that these false teachers were chipping away, little by little, at the wholeness or the integrity of God and His Word, by targeting small areas of belief. One at a time, that is all that it took. Just one little thing that starts to put doubt into the mind, and that is all that they want—just the one little hook in the mind that starts undermining our faith.

Do you remember, about 25-plus years ago, there was a group of people in the Worldwide Church of God who did the exact same thing? What did they do? Mr. Armstrong dies. “Oh, we’re family, everybody get together, we’re all united.” Then they throw one thing out. “Did you know that there’s no need to have faith for healing? That’s not what the sacrifice is all about.” That is all that it took, just one little thing, one little difference from what Mr. Armstrong taught, and it started to work on people.

Then six months later, they throw something else out. “Oh, we’re not exactly sure about the tribes of Israel anymore,” or they will throw something else out, which finally threw us over—“The Kingdom of God is mostly about now, and the Gospel is about now rather than later, so we aren’t going to be preaching very much about the Kingdom of God as a prophetic thing. We’re going to take away the goal.”

Do you know what? It destroyed the church of God, that organization. There are thousands who left the faith, all because these false teachers worked to undermine the integrity of the doctrine that we had gotten through Herbert Armstrong. And that is all that it took.

Do you know that they did the same exact thing that is happening in this country? One area after another is being taken away, small bits, so that our Constitution no longer means what it is supposed to mean. It is the same process, it comes from the same mind. They want to disturb the integrity or the wholeness of the doctrine, to make us doubt, and then to lose our faith.

Jude 3 and 4 says the exact same thing:

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Jude 3-4 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you see what he told us there? Their ultimate goal was to turn grace into license. So what did they do? They started chipping away, here and there, at things that were forbidden, and they opened them up saying, "God's grace will cover that. It's okay, you don't have to worry."

There is a truth in it, that if we repent, God will forgive us, but they were essentially saying as they were teaching these things that you do not have to give them up, and that God's grace will cover it all. Pretty soon, you deny the Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ, because He is no longer recognizable as the God that is in the Bible. Once you start teaching those things, it is not the same God. They deny Him, and deny Them, by the way they are living.

What is the solution for the few of us who actually believe, and wish to follow the whole counsel of God?

Psalms 118:5-9 I called on the Lord in distress; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is for me among those who help me; therefore I shall see my desire on those who hate me. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

This seems a pretty simple solution, but it is where we need to begin. When we are in distress like this, at a time when the world is winding down, and deceit is at its all time high, when the world is aimed and primed to deceive us and turn us from God, we have to remember that God is for us, that He is there for us. He is on our side; He is working to help us, constantly.

He has given us companions to help us through this time, and we need to be united, unified, with them, in believing the same thing so that we can go forward in strength, so that we can work together.

But He says we need to be careful about putting any trust in men and in worldly leadership. They are not to be trusted. Trust in God, give Him always the benefit of the doubt, even if you do not understand, because He is not going to lead you astray. He is the only one who is going to be straight with you.

Psalm 12:1-7 Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases! [Does that not sound like today?] For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men. They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart [a duplicitous heart] they speak. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things, who have said, “With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?” [Hey, I can say what I want! No one can stop me!] “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise,” says the Lord; “I will set him in the safety for which he yearns.” The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O Lord, you shall preserve them from this generation forever.

What was David’s solution? God is on His throne. He is working to help those, the needy, the faithful, who trust His Word. It is the only pure and true thing we have to rely on. It is so pure, it has been purified seven times. That is a metaphor for saying it is *absolutely* true and pure, it has never been contaminated, because its source is from God.

Did you notice verse 7? Verse 7 tells us that God has guaranteed that the word that we see in our Bibles is the same as what was written. We have not lost the truth, the truth is there. He has guaranteed its preservation—“You shall preserve them from this generation forever.”

So we do not need to worry about whether our translation is bad. We have access to the truth, God has made sure that He has preserved the truth for us, and that is what we need to look at, to turn to, when the going gets rough. When we do not know whether something is true or not, put it through the sieve of God’s Word.

John 17:17 says “His word is truth.” That is what we are set apart by, that we believe the truth. We have been given the Holy Spirit so that we can understand it and put it into practice.

Isaiah is another one who was living through a time of great deception and great trouble

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in his country. He is given instruction by God about what to do.

Isaiah 8:11-18 For the Lord spoke thus to me with a strong hand [God was very forceful], and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying: "Do not say, 'A conspiracy,' concerning all that this people call a conspiracy, nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. He will be as a sanctuary [meaning a place you can run to for help], but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken, be snared and taken." Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait on the Lord, who hides His face from the house of Jacob; and I will hope in Him. Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion.

Isaiah 8:20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

We have to do just as God instructed Isaiah: we must flee to God. We must fear Him and want to please Him, before all others. We have to concentrate on, and study the law and the testimony of God, this Book, the whole counsel. We have to be lights to the world, as signs and wonders in our practice of God's way. And when questions arise, we evaluate everything in light of God's Word.

Scripture is our only trustworthy source available to us for the truth, and with God's Spirit, we can know it and use it, and expose the deceit and prepare for God's Kingdom.