

## Will Deceive Many (Part Two)

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Those who watch the signs of the times (Matthew 16:3) see evidence that Jesus Christ's return is near. In [Part One](#), we saw that Jesus warns that the most significant challenge at this time would be resisting deception—a deception so strong that He warns that many would be deceived (Matthew 24: 5, 10-12), possibly even half (Matthew 25:1-13). We need to know how to defend ourselves against such a serious and imminent threat.

### **God's Word—Our Strongest Defense**

Deception is a serious challenge, as Christ warns. How can we protect ourselves and avoid falling for it? Richard Ritenbaugh provides an answer in his February 3, 2001, [sermon](#), commenting on John 8:32, 42-47:

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. . . . 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. (Emphasis in original.)

God's Word is the key. Indisputable biblical truths give us an unshakable foundation to stand firm in truth and avoid deception. But we must spend time in His Word—studying and understanding His truth. Making this effort helps us to distinguish between truth and lies.

Genuine protection lies in actively applying God's Word in our lives. This kind of faithfulness is not passive but requires deliberate effort and commitment. By immersing ourselves in God's Word and living out His

instructions daily, we strengthen our ability to discern truth from deception. This practice keeps us anchored in His unwavering truth.

In his December 27, 2024, *CGG Weekly* [essay](#), Richard Ritenbaugh stresses the need to anchor our beliefs in clear and foundational verses:

When studying a biblical topic, it is always helpful to begin with a plain, unambiguous statement that provides a fundamental understanding of the subject. Such a clear and concise scriptural declaration becomes a springboard for expanding our inquiry into deeper and less distinct areas of the doctrine. As long as we hold on to these clear scriptures—which can be called “definition verses,” for lack of a better term—allowing them to underlay and delineate our belief, we are likely to remain on course.

These foundational scriptures act as guiding lights, helping us handle confusion and challenges with clear understanding. Focusing on these “definition verses” keeps us from falling for false ideas or getting distracted by minor details. By trusting God’s truth and living according to His Word, we grow stronger to resist deception. This strength helps us face life’s challenges with confidence, staying aligned with His purpose.

### **Spotting Deception—Learn from the Experts**

Knowing God’s truth helps us recognize and avoid deception. A powerful example comes from U.S. Treasury agents and how they detect counterfeit money. Instead of studying fake bills, they focus on real currency, memorizing every detail. This deep familiarity makes it easy for them to spot even the tiniest of flaws. Just as Treasury agents thoroughly examine real currency, the more we commit ourselves to studying God’s Word, the easier it is to recognize false doctrines.

Treasury agents train by memorizing every detail of real bills. They focus on the size, texture, and exact placement of lines, colors, and words on both sides. They also study how the paper feels and the unique features of each denomination.

By mastering these details, they can quickly spot fake bills, no matter how real they seem. In the same way, when we are grounded in the truth of God's Word, recognizing deception becomes a skill we develop. This skill helps us spot lies more easily. The more time we spend studying and living by Scripture, the better we can protect ourselves from falsehood.

## **Focus on the Truth**

Christians must also develop a deep understanding of God's Word, just like agents master genuine currency. Doing this requires dedication, time, and focus to learn the Bible's unchanging truths. This effort sets the elect apart from the "many." The elect understand what is at stake and approach this with a serious purpose. Instead of getting distracted by different forms of deception, they stay focused on what is true—God's consistent, never-changing truth (Psalm 119:160; Hebrews 13:8). This focus separates those who truly value the truth from those who are more likely to be deceived.

Christians must commit to studying God's Word carefully. The better we know the Bible, the easier it is to spot messages that twist or change the truth. Paul says in II Timothy 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Diligent effort helps believers detect false doctrines. They learn the main points and minor details of Scripture, like how Treasury agents study the details of real money.

But studying is not enough: Christians must also practice applying God's Word to real-life situations, just as agents practice finding fake bills by handling authentic and counterfeit bills until spotting the differences becomes second nature. In the same way, Christians must apply Scripture in real-life situations. Through consistent practice, Christians sharpen their ability to recognize truth from falsehood in doctrines, conversations, and cultural trends.

Hebrews 5:14 highlights the importance of practice: "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who *by reason of use* have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (emphasis ours). As counterfeit methods keep changing, agents must remain vigilant. Like

agents, Christians must stay alert by applying what they learn from their study of God's Word.

Staying alert is essential because challenges often arise from unexpected sources. Paul warns in Acts 20:30: "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." Vigilance means knowing God's Word and testing all messages against it.

## **New Truth?**

Testing beliefs is vital because studying God's Word, which is rich in meaning, can lead to deeper understanding. However, when someone claims to have found a "new truth," Herbert Armstrong's advice still matters: "Don't believe me—BELIEVE YOUR BIBLE—BELIEVE GOD!" He warned that no matter who the person is, even himself, we must trust God and His Word above all else.

Mr. Armstrong stressed that the Bible is our unchanging standard for discerning truth. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." To evaluate any claim of "new truth," we must study all of God's instructions and avoid relying on isolated verses. It is God's truth that will protect the elect from the signs and wonders used by deceivers in the latter times (Matthew 24:24). The elect must judge all messages against every part of God's Word—the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

Paul warns those with God's Spirit about the dangers of the last days: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (I Timothy 4:1). This stark warning raises an important question: How could someone with God's Spirit be led astray?

## **Testing the Spirits**

We find part of the answer in the Parable of the Ten Virgins. The Ten Virgins represent God's people before Christ returns (Matthew 25:1-13). This parable provides a crucial lesson for God's people today. The foolish virgins did not do the work needed to keep enough oil for their lamps. Their

lamps represent God's Word, which guides the way (Psalm 119:105). Keeping their lamps burning required consistent effort. This "work" involves more than just believing we know the truth—it means using good judgment and testing everything to ensure our beliefs align with God's truth.

What kind of work should they have been doing? The apostles Paul and John give clear guidance.

» Test all things; hold fast what is good. (I Thessalonians 5:21)

» Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (I John 4:1)

Testing helps ensure something meets a set standard. For Christians, that standard is God's Word. As Paul instructs, we are to test all things. The wise virgins follow this practice, but the foolish do not. Their neglect leaves them vulnerable to deception and serious consequences, as history shows.

## **No Light in Them**

Consider what happened during the days of the Worldwide Church of God. One man relied on Greek logic instead of Scripture to convince members to accept his ideas. He introduced confusion about doctrines like the Trinity and the nature of God, relying on his credentials rather than God's Word. Because many members failed to test his words against Scripture, they were deceived. This failure serves as a clear warning about the danger of neglecting God's standard and relying on human reasoning instead.

The apostle John's warning to test the spirits carries a profound implication. There are only two spiritual influences: God's and Satan's. This truth underscores how critical it is to measure every teaching and belief against the whole truth of God's Word. Without this foundation, we risk being deceived by Satan's spirit of deception.

Consider the man who relied on human reasoning instead of Scripture to mislead the Worldwide Church of God. His ideas did not come from God, leaving only one other source, Satan, the enemy who uses deception as his

primary weapon. This situation highlights the critical importance of following John's instruction in I John 4:1 to test the spirits. Without a firm foundation in Scripture, people risk being deceived by false spirits and drifting away from God's truth (I Timothy 4:1).

Another verse with serious implications is 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." God is light (I John 1:5), and Jesus, the Lamb, is light (Revelation 21:23). If the people listening to this man had applied this verse, they would have recognized that his messages lacked light—and, therefore, lacked God's Spirit. They could have spared themselves from falling into deception.

Anyone who speaks their ideas without clear support from Scripture raises a red flag—a warning sign that should not be ignored. Recognizing the absence of light is a key step to staying spiritually safe.

## **Deception Is a Choice**

Noticing that someone is not using Scripture is only part of the issue. We must understand that our human nature (Jeremiah 17:9) makes us prone to deception. Richard Ritenbaugh made a point of this in the introduction to his July 1997 *Forerunner* article, "[Deceptions of the End Time](#)":

Human nature is incredibly self-deceptive. Sometimes the truth hurts, and our hearts—"deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9)—will avoid admitting the truth at all costs. The heart is so deceitful that it will often not admit it can be deceived!

As he explains, our hearts often choose deception over truth to shield us from the pain of confronting flaws in our self-image. This choice reflects how deeply we seek to protect ourselves from discomfort and harsh realities. We do this for various reasons, such as:

1. **Preservation of Self-Image** - Protecting ourselves to avoid admitting unpleasant truths about the self.

2. **Cognitive Ease** - Accepting what feels true because questioning it requires effort or uncomfortable change.
3. **Avoidance of Cognitive Dissonance** - Selectively ignoring facts that conflict with our beliefs to avoid making changes.
4. **Emotional Comfort** - Adopting comforting falsehoods to shield ourselves from painful truths.
5. **Social and Cultural Pressures** - Succumbing to the world's lies to avoid the pain of resisting them.
6. **Confirmation Bias** - To avoid the mental work of testing our beliefs, we hold on to what we already believe.
7. **Desire for Control or Predictability** - Believing lies that offer a false sense of control, such as superstitions about luck or fate.

At the heart of these actions is resistance to change—the very thing overcoming requires. These habits often take place without much thought. Yet self-deception remains a deliberate choice, deciding to take the easy way of going with the flow instead of fighting against our human nature. Rather than confronting the discomfort of truth, human nature often takes mental shortcuts to avoid feeling uneasy or uncertain.

Our emotional responses drive these reactions. They enable us to avoid hard truths or cling to safe beliefs. We ignore facts that challenge our beliefs or accept comforting lies during difficult moments. These habits shape what we believe before we even realize it.

The first step in avoiding deception is recognizing that not making a choice is still a choice. It is a choice that often leads to self-deception. Even a single step toward self-deception creates an opening for Satan to exploit. He then draws us deeper into his web of lies.

This pattern is what happened to Eve. Her desire for what Satan offered led her to justify disobedience to God (Genesis 3:6). Her willingness to justify

her desires not only led to her downfall but also provided an opening for Satan to begin his deception of the whole world (Revelation 12:9). Eve's story is a stark example of how even small steps in the wrong direction can lead to much greater deception.

Benjamin Franklin noted how easy it is for people to justify their actions: "So convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable creature, since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do." His words point to the power of human reasoning as a tool for self-deception. These words urge us to evaluate our thoughts and actions against God's truth.

### **Spotless, Without Wrinkle**

God's people need to work diligently to avoid the trap of self-justification. Even the slightest change to God's truth is unacceptable. The Bible provides clear warnings about this, including:

» Therefore you shall be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. (Deuteronomy 5:32)

» Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it. (Deuteronomy 12:32)

» As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:9)

» A little leaven leavens the whole lump. (Galatians 5:9)

» [K]nowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. (II Peter 1:20)

These warnings are critical. Through stories, the Bible shows exactly how God reacts to even small acts of disobedience:

» Based on one flaw, God rejects Cain's offering (Genesis 4:3-7).



» In Leviticus 10:1-3, Aaron's sons were struck dead instantly for ignoring one simple instruction about incense.

» Uzzah was struck dead by God (I Chronicles 13:9-10) for the simple act of touching the ark (Numbers 4:15).

» The man of God did not follow God's simple instruction. He did not avoid eating or drinking while giving a message to King Jeroboam (I Kings 13:8-9). For that, God delivered him to a lion to be killed (verse 26).

These examples clearly show how seriously God views even minor disobedience. They remind us of the danger of adding our ideas to God's commands or straying from His Word. We are called to live by *every* word of God and to keep His truth pure and unaltered.

Ephesians 5:25-27 emphasizes this call for purity and complete obedience:

. . . just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

## **Your Word Is Truth**

Resisting deception and staying faithful to God's Word without deviating is crucial for those in these Laodicean times. Christ warns that self-deception, demonstrated by the Laodiceans (Revelation 3:14-22), is the first step in a broader challenge of deception. Honest self-examination is essential. Without it, we risk being blind to our spiritual state and falling for lies. Holding firmly to God's Word is the only way to stand firm against Satan's attacks. In the end times, Satan will use signs and wonders to make his lies so convincing that they could, if possible, mislead even God's elect (Matthew 24:24).

God's Word is the foundation that equips us to recognize and resist deception. Christ's Parable of the Ten Virgins reminds us of the effort

required to maintain and strengthen this foundation. The wise virgins kept their lamps filled with oil, representing their preparation and dedication. Staying alert and ready for His return means understanding God's Word, staying watchful, and living by His truth. These actions protect us from the powerful deceptions of the end times.

The stakes could not be higher. God's standard is perfection. Even small mistakes can lead to fatal results. However, His truth sanctifies us when we fully embrace it, preparing us to stand as a spotless Bride, ready for Christ's return.

As the elect, we are called to reject compromise, hold fast to the truth, and remain unshakable in our faith. By examining ourselves diligently, grounding our lives in God's Word, and following the example of the wise virgins, we can be ready for Christ's glorious return, set apart from those led astray by deception.