

February 15, 2023

Dear Brethren,

Every day, we have to make judgments about whom and what to believe. Our news, governments, media, and general interactions with others have elements of fact and falsity mixed together, putting a veil over the actual truth. It is not a new problem for anyone, of course. Deception has been rampant in various shapes and forms for mankind since the time that Satan deceived Eve. The most significant difference for us is that our information sources are much more diverse. Even though our modern advancements in sharing information present different challenges, we can learn a lot from the biblical record of Eve's deception. To be more specific, we can learn from Adam and Eve's mistake in making a bad choice about whom to obey and what to believe, and apply that lesson in our lives today.

In their situation, both of them might have believed what they were doing was good. Satan's manipulation influenced the judgment of Eve. He blatantly lied to her, leading her to believe that it was a good thing to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Her choice in believing Satan demonstrates a form of deception that is very direct and intentional. His motive was to tell her a lie and cause her to disobey the commandment from God. Adam's situation is slightly different. The Bible only makes a brief comment about their interaction, "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate" (Genesis 3:6). At this point, Eve did not know that she had been deceived, so it is unlikely that she intentionally deceived Adam like Satan deceived her. Yet, Adam was not deceived (1 Timothy 2:14); still, he made a poor judgment in choosing whom to obey. Eve might have sincerely believed her offer to Adam was generous and safe, but Adam was too weak to resist Eve. Instead, he followed Eve's bad example, although he knew better.

When we consume information, it can be very hard to know whether to believe it or not because it might come from a source that tells us what we want to hear. The information that appeals to our carnal nature will be the most tempting to believe. For example, if we hear good things about ourselves that are consistent with how we see ourselves, we will tend to believe them even if those things might not be true. If we hear news reports that appeal to our worldview, we will be more apt to believe them. The contrary is also true. We will resist believing things that are inconsistent with our view of ourselves and the world we live in. The problem is that we might be victims of passive manipulation like Adam was. Well-meaning sincere people will feed us information, which might not be true, leading us to fall into a trap of believing a lie.

We have an endless stream of information to consume, which invariably mixes the Truth and the lie. Knowing that we are doomed to make eventual mistakes in our fallible, human judgment about what to believe, what can we do about it? To effectively fight against deception, we have to acknowledge who the enemy is. It is too easy to blame the sources of information that we can see with our own eyes and hear with our own ears. Politicians, biased media sources, corporations, and individuals might be the ones sending messages to us with the intention of influencing our beliefs. But they are not, or might not be, inherently the enemy of Truth. Satan is. They are merely pawns in the war for our allegiance. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). Therefore, to protect ourselves from being deceived we have to begin by forfeiting the attempt to learn the Truth with worldly methods. Since our battle is spiritual, we have to use spiritual weapons.

We live in a world that is corrupt, and there is nothing we can do to fix it. When Jesus prayed to God

in the garden at Gethsemane, He expressed the tenuous situation in which He left His disciples, and us by extension (compare John 17:14-15). He didn't pray to remove us from the spiritual dangers of the world, but rather, to protect us from the deceptive ways of Satan – the ruler of this world (compare Ephesians 6:12, Revelation 12:9). Through Satan's influence, the world that we live in threatens to eliminate us and prevent us from receiving the spiritual gift God promises us. If we allow ourselves to be pulled away from our spiritual focus and choose instead to subscribe to the ideologies that appeal to our carnal nature, we will inevitably fall away from God.

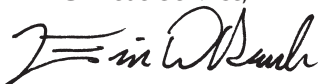
To fight against deception in this world on its own terms is futile. We cannot win by playing the game for our eternal lives by the rules set by the world. The source of deception is Satan, whose sole purpose is to influence us to turn away from God. When we fight with worldly means, we will fall victim to Satan's deception. Aligning ourselves with political parties and adopting the ideas of public figures who espouse their own morality by the reasoning of man will augur us deeper into the world. Even if these things sound good and right to us, we must beware. Our instruction is to separate ourselves from the systems of the world (compare Revelation 18:4). We have a better, even perfect, set of spiritual rules by which we lead our lives.

If we want to succeed in our fight against the deception of Satan in this world, living by the perfect commandments of God that lead us to the Truth, we must remain accountable individually. We have to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (compare Philippians 2:12). We do this by developing and nurturing our sincere LOVE for the Truth. If we do not have that love, we are doomed to be led away to believe the unrighteous lie that seems to be pleasant (compare 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). With our love for the Truth and desire to live by it, we equip ourselves with our best defense against the wiles of Satan. When we love the Truth, we draw near to God who is the source of it. In doing this, Satan loses his ability to pull us away and retreats (compare James 4:7-8). Through Satan's influence, the world will broadcast all kinds of information designed to distract us from what really matters. But when we keep our minds set on spiritual things, being directed by God, we are not led astray.

We should consider ourselves to be very, very fortunate if God has opened our minds to understand the Truth. By that Truth, we are set apart from the rest of the world for the purpose of salvation (compare John 17:16-19). By that Truth, we learn how to live in a superior way. "Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day" (Psalm 25:4-5). The only way that we can win the battle against the deception of the world is by looking to God for the Truth. Man will attempt to compel us to believe that there is a better way to follow, devised by him. But if that way leads us away from God in any way, we cannot trust it. The measure of Truth is not found by the methods of man, but in adherence with God's commandments.

The Church of the Eternal God and its international affiliates have a mission to faithfully and fully uphold the Truth of God. We are accountable to you as brethren, to Jesus Christ as our High Priest, and to God the Father, the Almighty. If we were to take this assignment lightly, we would experience dire consequences. For that reason, we are committed to doing our very best so that you are well-equipped to understand the Truth and to live by it. Your support through prayer, words of encouragement, tithes, and offerings keep this Work going. For whatever you may have offered this Church as a personal sacrifice—great or small—we thank you. The Work of upholding the Truth requires the kind of team effort where we all contribute with the means we are blessed with. As we stand together against the ways of this world, we can take solace that we have a source of Truth that we can trust, and that we have a future that will be free of deception.

In Christ's Service,



Eric Rank