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Deceived? *Not me!*

by James McBride

In our world we ought by now to have become used to the idea that we could, indeed, have been deceived. What about those glowing promises from our politicians. Or, in the supermarket, deceptively displayed packages and products that aren't all they claim. Or 'friends' whom we later discover were merely *using* us. Then there's the friendly persuasion from the insurance giant—which refuses to honour promises of a pay-out or the energy firm that hides cheaper tariffs from loyal consumers.

Yes, deception is very possible in many sectors of our daily life. *Think about it*—you will be able to identify other deceivers!

There is, however, one source that we probably won't consider worth checking. *Religion*.

No way, we reason, would my friendly parish priest or pastor feed me false information. Isn't what he tells me a matter that transcends this life and on into my eternal destiny?

There are, of course, countless unscrupulous fiery tele-evangelists who are just after our tithe (on the excuse of future financial blessing). Most of us (but not all) are up to their tricks and avoid them. Others will divert a freely-given offering into a personal new car or extending a home. (Why do we go on giving to them? Fear?)

But what if your religious leader is himself deceived and believes his message is spot on and Biblically sound?

The apostle Paul addresses this in writing to his

protégé the young and inexperienced Timothy: '*...the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing [deceiving] spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron*' (I Timothy 4:1-2).

Could my Bible-bashing pastor really qualify as a 'hypocrite'? What if he has frequently in his studies had 'a brush with the truth'—a truth contrary to what he had been taught or was teaching—and just ignored it? Isn't it possible, then, that before long he is *blind* to that truth, his '*...conscience seared*'?

The perversion of that truth will then be heard from the pulpit, preached with, what is *to him*, a clear conscience.

Such authority figures command our respect. We believe he (or she) knows whereof they speak. We are, unknowingly, *deceived*.

Truth Frees

Truth matters. Certainly there is much in the Scriptures that doesn't deserve argument. *Much does*. So we must be involved with the Scriptures: '*...If you continue in My Word, you are truly My disciples. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*' (John 8:32).

The onus is on each of us to thoroughly assess what we hear from the pulpit (or the Press!).

For example, the apostle Paul warned his readers in Galatia that there was a 'false gospel' doing the rounds: '*... I am surprised at you! In no time at all*

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you are deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ, and are accepting another gospel. Actually, there is no "other gospel," but I say this because there are some people who are upsetting you and trying to change the gospel of Christ' (Galatians 1:6,7). It is, in the words of Jesus by the apostle John '...the everlasting gospel' (Revelation 14:6).

What message are *you* hearing in church? Is it authentic, the real thing, the one taught by Jesus?

We tend to shut our ears to new ideas—especially changes to our long-held beliefs, perhaps held from childhood from 'our mother's knee'. Once an Anglican, a Methodist, a Baptist *etc* we usually remain so, unquestioningly.

Error Blinds

Paul again: '*...if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them' (II Corinthians 4:3, 4). That 'god' is '...the prince of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the children of disobedience' (Ephesians 2:2).*

The *real* Gospel has over the centuries become buried under an avalanche of false teachings. Even in the days of the apostles teachers had introduced a deluge of heathen philosophies and practices which overwhelmed the church of God and supplanted the pure teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

Jude (a brother of Jesus) had this to say: '*...when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints' (v.3). The teaching of the apostles is the gold standard—doctrinal innovation is anathema. Peter adds: '...For we have not followed cunningly devised fables' (II Peter 1:16).*

Lost Truth

The early church all but abandoned these principles spiraling downwards into the morass that was the mediaeval church. It held its malevolent violent murderous sway for a thousand years, persecuting the tiny remnant of those who clung to those apostolic teachings.

Our readers, however, must not be complacent, for many of the same errors remain uncorrected—despite the Reformation. Indeed since the turn of this century major denominations have placed themselves under to authority of the Pope and that same perverse doctrinal system, a system designed to, in the years ahead, enslave all faiths, and to once and for all destroy the one and only church of God—the body of true believers.

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