

Whom Do You Believe?

by Ken Davies

"But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." -- 2 Cor. 11:3

Most Christians are familiar with at least a *few* Bible verses. How many people here have heard these?

"Pride goes before a fall."

"The lion shall lie down with the lamb."

"Money is the root of all evil."

"To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

If I asked you to find them in the Bible, how many of you believe you could do that? Think about that while I tell you a little story.

A lady decided one day to buy a dog. And since she was a staunch Baptist, she wanted her dog to be a Baptist, too. She went to several animal shelters before finally finding the dog she wanted.

The woman was so thrilled with her new acquisition that she decided invite one of the elders from her church to visit. When he arrived, the lady could hardly contain her excitement. "Elder Jones, you *must* see this fine Baptist dog I've just bought!"

"How do you know he's a Baptist?" asked the Elder.

"Just watch!" she gushed. Then, speaking to the dog, she commanded, "Fetch the Bible!"

The dog ran into the other room and came back with a large King James version Bible in his mouth.

"Find Psalm 23," said the lady. The dog quickly opened the Bible and used his paw to locate the psalm.

Elder Jones was very impressed. "But I'm curious if the dog can do any 'normal' tricks."

The lady hadn't considered this, so she tried a few commands.

"Sit!" she told the dog.

He sat.

"Roll over!" she commanded.

The dog rolled over.

“Heel!” she said.

Immediately, the dog jumped up on the couch next to the elder put his paw on the man’s forehead, and bowed his head in prayer.

The lady cried out in dismay, “I have been deceived! This dog isn’t a Baptist, he’s a Pentecostal!”

Now, about those Bible verses. How many of you are confident you could find them in the Bible?

How about if I gave you a **concordance** to use, how many of you think you could find them in the Bible then?

Guess what? Even with a concordance, you’d be looking for a LONG TIME for those verses, because they DON’T EXIST in the Bible! Let’s look at them one by one:

“**Pride goes before a fall.**” This is actually: “Pride goes before **destruction**, a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18)

“**The lion shall lie down with the lamb.**” Many of you will be surprised to find out that this **isn’t** in the Bible! The reference is either to **Isaiah 11:6-7**:

“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.”

or possibly to **Isaiah 65:25**: “‘The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,’ says the Lord.”

How about “**Money is the root of all evil**”? You will find this statement in Scripture, but you will find that it is **incomplete**. It therefore misrepresents the truth. The complete verse is: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10).

Surely, “**To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord**” is in Scripture. We’ve heard this “quoted” many, many times! In 2 Cor. 5:8, Paul states that he “would **prefer** to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

You may be thinking, “That’s a pretty subtle distinction!” True, but a very small difference can make huge difference theologically-speaking. Take John 1:1 for example. The New World Translation (the Jehovah’s Witness version) says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god [small ‘g’].” Every other English translation I know of says, “the Word was God” (capital ‘G’). Small and subtle difference, isn’t it? But what a difference it makes theologically-speaking!

In the first case, you have Jesus as some sort of deity other than Jehovah, the true God. Therefore, Jesus must be some sort of false god. This fits in perfectly with the Jehovah’s Witness doctrine that Jesus was Michael the archangel before he was sent to earth to be born as a baby.

In the other case, Jesus is as much God as the Father. Subtle change, huge difference! That's why we need to be very careful with our handling of the Word of God.

You may **think** you know what the Bible says, but maybe you need to double-check to see if you've got it right!

The Bible tells us over and over not to be deceived.

A newsboy was standing on the corner with a stack of papers and yelling, "Read all about it. Fifty people deceived! Fifty people deceived!"

Curious, a man walked over, bought a paper, and checked the front page. Finding nothing, the man said, "There's nothing in here about fifty people being deceived."

The newsboy ignored him and went on, calling out, "Read all about it. Fifty-**one** people deceived!"

In Matt. 10:16, Jesus told His disciples to be "wise as serpents, but gentle as doves". What does that mean?

There are people in this world whose purpose in life seems to be to deceive us. From the politician who steals our money, takes bribes for passing legislation favorable to only a few or selling secrets to our enemies, and escapes prosecution for breaking the law, to the huckster at the carnival.

Jesus was warning His disciples not to be taken in by these deceivers.

So, why **are** Christians deceived? Sometimes, it's a matter of believing what a false "prophet" or teacher puts forth. The problem is Biblical illiteracy! Having only a passing familiarity with the Scriptures, these Christians are easy prey for false teachers.

But it's not only those whom we know are "in the world" that can be deceptive. There are those within the Church that are out to make a buck by fooling Christians. The first part of Matt 10:16 says, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves."

Jesus also warned His disciples to "Beware of false prophets, who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are really vicious wolves" (Matt 7:15).

In Acts 20:29, the apostle Paul warned the Ephesian church, "I know that after I leave, fierce wolves will come among you, and they will not spare the flock."

People pretending to be Christians were going to try to "fleece the flock." There are those today who profess to be Christians, but teach things contrary to Scripture as though it is the gospel.

Some are very popular, and because the typical Christian only knows what he has been **told** is in the Bible, but never read it for himself, he believes what the false prophet is passing off as the truth.

Some of these false prophets are talented writers (or team up with others who are), and present their anti-Biblical notions in the form of gripping and entertaining novels.

Jesus said, “Be wise as serpents”. Just because something is **popular** in the Christian community doesn’t mean it’s **true**.

As Christians, how can we know whether something is true or not?

The ad in the local newspaper read: “Purebred Police Dog \$25.”

Thinking that to be a great bargain, a lady ordered the dog to be delivered. The next day a van pulled up and left her the scruffiest, mangiest-looking mongrel she had ever seen.

In a rage, she telephoned the man who had placed the ad. “What do you mean by calling that mangy mutt a purebred police dog?”

“Don’t be deceived by his looks, Ma’am,” the man replied. “He’s in the Secret Service.”

The people of the city of Berea were commended for their willingness to investigate what Paul had taught them. They didn’t just take what he said and believe it because of his exalted status as an apostle. In **Acts 17:11**, Luke says this of them:

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures** every day **to see if what Paul said was true**.

Wow! The Bereans weren’t afraid to question the great apostle Paul, and check to see if what he was teaching them was actually in the Word of God!

Can you imagine the reaction of today’s popular preachers to having their teachings checked out to see if they line up with the Bible? You’d probably hear an indignant misapplication of Ps. 105:15: “Don’t you dare to touch God’s anointed!”

There are a lot of things wrong with applying that verse to today’s preachers. The first thing you need to ask yourself is, “Who are God’s ‘anointed’ ones today?”

If you belong to the Lord, you are anointed by God with His Holy Spirit! Psalm 105:15 referred to the kings of Israel who received an anointing with literal, physical oil, and to the Old Testament prophets.

So, **how** are Christians deceived, and **why** are they so unwilling to change once they are?

The main reason they get fooled is that they are not really familiar with Scripture.

Bank tellers can usually recognize a counterfeit bill immediately. Why? Because tellers handle the real thing all day long!

That’s how we should be with Scripture! We should know our Bibles so well that when we hear error, we recognize it immediately.

Did you know that Moslems, atheists, and other types of non-Christians say that Jesus was a false prophet?

In 1927, the atheist, Bertrand Russell's article, "Why I Am Not a Christian" was first published. In that article, Russell attacks Christianity, trying to demonstrate how wrong and "contemptible" it is.

After saying he doubts whether Jesus ever existed, he says this under the heading entitled, "Defects in Christ's Teaching":

...I do not believe that one can grant either the superlative wisdom or the superlative goodness of Christ as depicted in the Gospels.... [T]here, one does find some things that do not seem to be very wise. For one thing, He certainly thought that His second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at that time. There are a great many texts that prove that. He says, for instance: 'Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come.' [Matt 10:23]

Then He says: 'There are some standing here which shall not taste death till the Son of Man comes into His kingdom' [Matt 16:27-28]; and there are a lot of places where it is quite clear that He believed that His second coming would happen during the lifetime of many then living. In that respect clearly He was not so wise as some other people have been, and he was certainly not superlatively wise.

As Christians, how do we answer these blasphemous accusations? Some choose to simply ignore this type of blatant attack on our Savior, but is that the proper response?

1 Peter 3:15 says that we should "always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." That implies that we actually know and understand Scripture!

Another reason Christians are deceived is that they **don't believe** what they read in the Bible! Incredulous, aren't you? You don't believe me! Let's look at an example.

Most of you have probably heard of C. S. Lewis (1898-1963). He was not only a Cambridge professor of English Medieval literature and a very successful novelist, but also a respected theologian. He wrote (among other works), *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *Mere Christianity*.

Near the end of his life, Lewis wrote another theological book entitled, *The World's Last Night: And Other Essays* (1960). In one section, he quotes the attacks of liberal scholars who said:

"...the first Christians have been proved to be false. It is clear from the New Testament that they all expected the Second Coming in their own lifetime. And, worse still, they had a reason, and one which you will find very embarrassing. Their Master had told them so. He shared, and indeed created, their delusion. He said in so many words, 'this generation shall not pass till all these things be done.' [Matt. 24:34] And he was wrong. He clearly knew no more about the end of the world than anyone else" [p. 97].

What was Lewis' response? "It is certainly the most embarrassing verse in the Bible."

Wait, WHAT? This respected theologian had NO viable response to those who attacked the integrity of our Lord and His Word!

Lewis goes on to "explain" what he meant by this:

Yet how teasing, also, that within fourteen words of it should come the statement, “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” The one exhibition of **error** and the one confession of ignorance grow side by side ... the facts, then, are these: that Jesus professed himself (in some sense) ignorant, and within a moment showed that he really was so [p. 97].

Did you catch that? Jesus, says C. S. Lewis, was **in error**. Is that the Jesus you believe in? That’s certainly not the Jesus of Scripture! C. S. Lewis simply didn’t believe what Jesus said! And, sadly, many Christians are just like him today.

Sometimes, we just have the wrong perspective on things. Think about this:

A boy kicks a soccer ball and it goes 10 feet, then comes back to him. How is that possible?

He kicked it **up**. You probably missed it because you were looking at the problem with the wrong perspective.

When we consider the prophecies of Christ’s second coming, oftentimes it’s in “literal” or materialistic terms. We miss what He said because we have the wrong perspective on it.

Are you misinterpreting what Scripture says?

Three rather dimwitted guys were driving to Disneyland when one of them saw a sign that said, “Disneyland left.” So, they turned around and went home.

Were they misinterpreting what they read? We may say, “Duh!” but are we guilty of doing the same thing?

Sometimes you have to **believe** something before you can **see** it! In the scientific community, they refuse to see the evidence for creation because they don’t believe it! It’s as if they’ve said, “If the **facts** do not conform to the theory, they must be discarded!”

Are you ignoring Scripture verses that you don’t believe? Worse yet, are you twisting those verses to **make** them say what you want them to?

There are dire warnings in Scripture against doing this. **Rev 22:18-19** says:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book.

And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this book.

When you have been taught to believe certain things, and someone comes along with ideas that are contrary to what you've been taught, you experience what is called "cognitive dissonance." You may not have heard that term. According to Wikipedia:

...[C]ognitive dissonance is the mental stress or discomfort experienced by an individual...[when] confronted by new information that conflicts with existing beliefs, ideas, or values.

An individual who experiences inconsistency (dissonance) tends to become psychologically uncomfortable, and is motivated to try to reduce this dissonance—as well as actively avoid situations and information likely to increase it.¹

It is the human tendency to immediately **reject** whatever contradicts what we already believe.

That means that if you believe something that is **contrary** to the Word of God, you will avoid reading those verses that contradict what you believe, and avoid anyone who talks about them!

This is where you will need to be a Berean, and push past your discomfort. Read and re-read those verses that you find so disconcerting. Ask yourself, "Do I understand and believe what I'm reading?" If not, there are a lot of tools available to help you!

I must warn you, though, to avoid going immediately to a commentary. Commentaries are not the unbiased works you may think they are. They are the product of the biases and beliefs of their authors.

Instead, study the context of the verses that are troubling you, and do word studies. The website, BibleHub.com, has some wonderful tools available.

Why do Christians **continue** to hold on to ideas even when they know in their hearts they are wrong? Pride. Plain and simple. People don't like to admit when they are wrong about something. After all, no one likes to look foolish!

I realize that it will take courage and strength to believe what you read in the Bible. But, remember: The Bible is the **Word of God**!

God told Joshua: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you...." (Josh 1:9). He had to tell Joshua **six** times to be strong and courageous! The Lord knows that we are naturally weak and timid. Pray for His strength and the guidance of His Holy Spirit, and most of all, ask for His wisdom and help in truly understanding His Word.

2 Tim 3:12-14 says:

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it....

If we really **are** followers of Jesus, we **must** believe His Word!

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_dissonance

This information was not included in the sermon, but is nevertheless pertinent:

In **Matt 16:27-28** Jesus said:

27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

28 "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

The Four Most Dangerous Mistakes Any Christian Can Make (not necessarily in this order):

- 1) Believing that we, or our pastor/denomination/spiritual leader cannot be fooled
- 2) Attributing every personal testimony and "sign" as being of or from God
- 3) Taking Bible verses out of context
- 4) Believing that we, as Christians, are not to judge anything or anyone.

Why Christians Are Deceived²

1. Too many Christians are Biblically illiterate, often not going beyond "bumper sticker" theology.
2. They tend to believe anything their Leadership says
3. They are reluctant to believe they, themselves, could be wrong
4. Christians do not want to be labeled "Heresy Hunters"
 - a. Accused of "quenching the Spirit"
 - b. Found guilty of "touching" the Lord's anointed
5. Christians believe they should be united and say they are commanded to love
6. Christians are often more conditioned by the culture than by the Bible
7. Many Christians are addicts
 - a. "Spiritual" highs ("second blessing" phenomena such as speaking in tongues, "prophesying," or being "slain in the Spirit," altered states of consciousness, etc.)
 - b. Word of Faith ("New Thought" occult ["magick"] practices)
 - c. Walking the Labyrinth

² http://www.inplainsite.org/html/why_christians_are_deceived.html