

Deceivers and Deception 1 John 2:18-29

Introduction:

We don't have to look very hard in the Bible to find warnings about spiritual deception. Several of them come out of the mouth of Jesus.

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

Matthew 24:24 *For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*

Mark 13:5-6 *And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many.*

Luke 21:8 *And He said: "Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them.*

The apostles echo Christ's warnings in their letters, for example Paul:

1 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,*

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

John also, not only in this letter but in his next one,

2 John 1:7 *For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.*

This is clearly a topic to take seriously and one which John will emphasize in the passage we look at today.

Outline:

- I. How to Recognize Deceivers 2:18-23
- II. How to Avoid Deception 2:24-29

I. How to Recognize Deceivers 2:18-23

2:18 **the last hour** John may have honestly thought, near the end of the first century, that Jesus was going to come back any time – as if he and his contemporaries were witnessing the onset of end-times events that would lead to Christ’s return. Nothing that he knew stood in the way of such a possibility. Much that he knew might have led him to that conclusion.

“In the Christian era it is always five minutes to midnight. But as ‘the course of things’ runs along the edge of the final consummation, that edge at times becomes a knife-edge, and at such times the sense of its being ‘the last hour’ is specially acute.” – F.F. Bruce

John lived in one of those times when the end seemed to be rapidly approaching. We live in such a time as well. The major point, however, is that the last days run through the whole of church history, so we should really always be ready.

Related terms in the NT:

- “the last hour” 1 John 2:18
- “the last days” Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3
- “the last time” Jude 18
- “the last times” 1 Pet. 1:20

Antichrist Also in **2:22; 4:3** and **2 John 7** See also **2 Thess 2:1-12**

Considering the way John uses the word, it might be best to refer to “the man of sin” that Paul talks about as “the final antichrist.” There will be many who precede him, but he will be the culmination of them all – the Big Kahuna.

2:19 John’s churches in Asia apparently experienced the recent departure of many of their members. There seems to have been a group, led by certain very gifted teachers who put together some exciting new ideas, that led a sort of opposition to John and his more basic teaching.

John concludes that the very fact that they have taken their doctrinal differences to that kind of extreme only reveals their apostasy. They were never really Christians at all.

Of course, not everybody who leaves a church is an antichrist or an apostate. Especially in our day when there are so many churches to choose from and many of them are perfectly good. Still, we can be sure that apostates will come up with creative alternatives and continue to lead people astray. Eventually they show their true colors and separate from the rest of the flock.

2:20 **Anointing** (*chrisma*) In the OT, a physical anointing with oil (e.g., Ex. 28:41; 1 Sam. 16:13) was an outward sign of the Holy Spirit’s inward empowering. The breakoff group may have especially emphasized anointing with oil. John is referring to that anointing which is the inner work of the Holy Spirit – as we’ll see later. This anointing – the presence of the Holy Spirit – is “the *chrisma* that makes us *Christians*.” It is a true Christian’s identifying mark.

Romans 8:9 *But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 ²¹*Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God,* ²²*who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*

2:20-21 **you know all things, or “you all have knowledge” (ESV), you know the truth**

What John is in effect saying is that the most inexperienced “baby Christian” knows enough of the truth, and has enough of the Holy Spirit, to distinguish the true gospel from a false one.

Illustration: When I first became a Christian, some Jehovah’s Witnesses came to the door, talked to me and started sending me one of their magazines. They came for a full year, but by the second or third month, I started throwing them away without reading them. I did not have a good grasp of the Bible at all at that time, let alone understand the differences between the *Watchtower* doctrines and genuine Christianity, but I was totally convinced that something was wrong. It was as if reading the magazine made me feel sick. Those people kept coming back and I had to keep telling them to go away.

2:22-23 Everything hinges on what a person believes about Jesus Christ. If someone does not believe that Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Christ, God’s own Son, sent from the Father, then that person opposes Christ. He or she cannot be in a right relationship to God the Father, for denying Christ is denying the whole foundation upon which fellowship with God is based.

In John’s day there was a teacher in Asia named Cerinthus. He taught that Jesus was a man who was given divine power – “the Christ” – at his baptism and which left him at his crucifixion. Basically he was saying, “Jesus is not the Christ.” For Cerinthus, they were two distinct entities. He was claiming faith in God while denying that Jesus was “the Son” in a divine sense. He was striking at the root of Christianity. John considered Cerinthus an enemy of the truth.

Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John and later bishop of Smyrna. He echoes his teacher’s language in a letter to the Philippian church:

“Every one who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is Antichrist. And whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross is of the devil; and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord to his own lusts and says that there is neither resurrection nor judgment - he is Satan’s firstborn”

There is no room here for an outlook that says, “All religions teach basically the same thing,” or “There are many paths to the same God.”

How do we recognize deceivers? They are not content with the traditional doctrines of the Christian faith and ultimately separate themselves from it. In particular, they mess with our beliefs about Jesus Christ, God the Son, who is fully God and fully human. He was born of a virgin, died for our sins, rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven and will someday return.

II. How to Avoid Deception 2:24-29

2:24 People used to say about John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, that his blood was "Bibline" – that the Bible was flowing through his veins. If you cut him, the Bible would pour out. That's how we need to be. Stay true to the Bible. Stay true to the basics of the faith.

2:25 See also **1:2** and **5:13**

"The only kind of life God offers is eternal life. If you lose it tomorrow or next week or next year, it isn't eternal life that you have. It is some other kind of life, but not eternal life." – J. Vernon McGee

2:26-27 This **anointing ... abides** The Holy Spirit isn't going anywhere

no need that anyone should teach you. By writing this letter, John is obviously teaching them. His point is that they don't need any teaching that deviates from the basic gospel message.

The Holy Spirit, that *chrisma* that makes us *Christians* – *remains* and *teaches*.

The anointing **abides** or "remains":

John 14:16 *And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—*

The anointing **teaches**:

John 14:26 *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*

"John warns against ostensibly Christian teachers who claim to have some sort of inside track with God that others do not, and perhaps cannot, enjoy." – D.A. Carson

"The antidote to falling into false ideas of the Christian faith is to be found in holding fast to the initial statement of Christian truth, given in the apostolic witness, as this is confirmed in our hearts by the anointing given by the Spirit." – I. Howard Marshall

"If you have God's Word in your hand and God's Spirit in your heart you have everything you need to understand truth and grow in Christ. Don't go on a ceaseless quest for novelty." – David Jackman

English Bible teacher David Jackman tells the story of a young man who was serving a long sentence for terrorist offences in Northern Ireland and who had been taking part in the 'dirty protest' (an IRA protest in the late 70s/early 80s in which the prisoners refused to wash or even leave their cells to use the toilet). The only thing left in his cell was a Gideons' Bible and he devoted his time to reading it. But he could not understand it, so he asked to see the prison chaplain, who told him to ask God, the Holy Spirit, to open his spiritual understanding. This he did, and it was not long before he was born again, came off the protest and began to grow rapidly as a Christian. The Word of God had rooted him into Christ, where he remains.

2:28 **abide in him** Maintaining our personal relationship with Christ will prevent us from straying into doctrine or conduct of which we will be ashamed **at His coming**.

There is a play on words here. God's children should have parrēsia (confidence) at His parousia (appearing or "coming"). That confidence is the assured outcome of abiding in Him. One sign of whether or not we are ready to meet Him might be our attitude toward His coming at present.

2:29 God is righteous and his children take after him.

Illustration: Krystiana and I took the same personality test – and we came out the same.

"The logical consequence of my being in him and his being in me is that my life will be increasingly characterized by doing what is right. The habit of righteousness is the proof of the relationship."

– Jackman

How do we avoid deception? By simply filling ourselves with the Bible and staying true to the basics of the faith.

Application:

1. Be prepared for deceivers to come.
2. Avoid any teaching that implies some “special knowledge” or “deeper understanding” not available to other normal Christians.
 - a. Don’t look for novelty in teaching.
 - b. Don’t look for teaching that makes you dissatisfied with the basics of the faith.
3. Fall in love with the Bible. Read it, study it and meditate on it. Put it into practice.
4. Stay in fellowship – and grow in fellowship – with other Christians.
5. Small group prayer and Bible study – in your home, with your family, at work, wherever with whomever you are able.
6. Abide in Christ.

John 15:5 *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*

7. Constant conscious reliance upon the Holy Spirit – for help, discernment, guidance, wisdom.
8. The exclusive nature of the Christian faith – the fact that we believe that people can be saved only by coming to God through Christ – is the basis for our mission as the church.
 - a. Evangelism is needed because people need to hear about Jesus or have the gospel explained to them.
 - b. Missionaries are needed because people are lost and need to hear. People are believing lies and worship that which is unworthy of worship. They need to hear the truth.
9. Remember that this is a dangerous hour. There are plenty of hostile forces at work. What we believe does matter, as does our fellowship with other Christians. We need to be realistic about our enemy, but confident in our Savior. Don’t be deceived.