

## Paraklēsis: Deception

I recently gave a speech that introduced myself - it was an "icebreaker" speech of sorts. I needed to give my audience, in six minutes, as comprehensive as possible, a description of who I am and how I got to be this way. That sounded easy when I first heard the instruction. But then, I realized that I didn't really know "who I am and how I got to be this way." I spent a lot of time thinking about that and taking notes and eventually culling out the really key stuff. Have you ever done that? I think it is very valuable and recommend it.

Of all the possibilities I could have selected, here is what rose to the top for me... I have always been convinced that God has been working with me all my life - long before I ever knew Him or His interest in me. What I came to realize in my recent reflection is that God has been influencing who I am now since long before I was born. In fact, only He knows how far back it started. And that leads me to wonder about the future... but that is a different story.

After thinking this over, I am feeling like I have been progressing toward an ability to better identify deception. We live in a world of deception. "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:24) When I say "deception," I'm not only talking about the fake news and hyperbole that we're being fed by the leaders and media. I'm also talking about morality. Looking around, it is pretty obvious that Satan's work has been to dilute purity and derange truth and distract attention away from God.

What a blessing it is to have a relationship with God where He lets me see through some of the lies. What a challenge it is for me to try to illuminate this for my kids.

But they're getting it. We are all slowly getting it thanks to the patience and mercy that God has. Last Sabbath we heard a sermon on idols and the danger they present. We need to learn to identify them in our lives. I am still wondering what a good test is for us to use to examine and judge something in our lives as an idol. Any ideas?

Last night, Ian (my 9 year old son) said, "So, you can pursue anything you want, but if you notice that God is not in the same direction, you better turn around." I think that is a pretty good test. The key to that test is that we need to be looking for God. If our eyes are continuously on the prey or the pursuit, we stand a good chance to not notice what direction God is in.

Isn't deception, by definition, when you don't see the truth? People who are deceived usually don't know it - until after. Not only do we need to continually keep our eyes on God and our attention trained on Him, but we should (in our spare time...) be asking Him to illuminate deception for us so we can see it and avoid it.

*Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."  
(Matthew 16:22-25)*

I am seeing that a lot of the deception that we are subject to is very subtle. As humans, evil or loving, compassionate or callous, selfish or generous, nurturing or abusive... etc, we are all common in thinking that our way is right. Even the most open-minded folks are inherently right in their own eyes. I am seeing this as a great deception that we all suffer from. I am not saying that whatever we think is right is not. I am saying that we need to always look to God for what is right and with our open and humble minds, change what doesn't align with His way. Peter (as would most of us, I suspect) did not want to hear or believe that his beloved Messiah was to be brutally treated and ultimately killed. But, amazingly, Peter was harshly

chastised for expressing the love and compassion that he had for The Son. Why? Because his thinking was not in line with that of the Father's. Set your mind on The Father's interests, not man's. That makes me think of another scripture:

*But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:29)*

Praise from God is what we should be seeking - storing up treasures in Heaven.

Peace to you all,

-Nate

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