

Are You Deceiving Yourself?

Of all kinds of deception, self-deception is the most deadly.

Of all who are deceived, the self-deceived are those who are least likely to discover the fraud.

The reason for the above statement is simple.

When a person is deceived by another person they are deceived against their will.

Such a person, knowing it or not, is contending against the person and is temporarily the victim of the other person's guile.

Since such a person is watchful of what other people are saying and are quick to suspect trickery. This is a very strong defence if we have once been deceived and found out the truth later.

With self-deception it is a very different situation.

We are our own enemy and are working a fraud upon ourselves.

We desire to believe the lie and are psychologically conditioned to do this, not wanting to "lose face."

We do **not** resist the deceit, for it is part of us, and we collaborate with it against ourselves.

There is no struggle to be free, in fact we may begin to enjoy being deceived.

Galatians 6:3 [NIV] *"If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself."*

Paul's warning is very true to life.

James 1:26 [NIV] *"If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless."*

A very strong warning from James.

The fact is that a person who is deeply religious is far more vulnerable to self-deception than the person who takes religion lightly.

The person who takes religion lightly may be deceived but **not** self-deceived.

Under the pressure of a deep spiritual concern, before wholly surrendering to the will of the Holy Spirit, a person may try, in any self-deceptive way, to hold onto their old independent way of life.

This self-deception is always dangerous and may be fatal if persisted with.

Human nature is idolatrous, considering that we are the centre of the universe, that all the rest of humanity revolves around our desires.

This self-worship is deadly, but there seems to be no limit to which some humans will go to save this idol.

At the same time, in self-deception, telling all other people that they are trusting in Christ alone.

It takes a violent act of the Holy Spirit to deliver a self-deceived person from such a hidden idol.

Very few Christians today understand that such an act by the Holy Spirit is necessary, and part of the work of the Holy Spirit to bring us to maturity.

John 16:8 [NIV] *“When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”*

Exposing the sin of a world who are in general self-deceived, and leading them to an attitude of repentance.

Prayer is usually recommended as a panacea for all ills, but we must **not** forget that some kinds of prayer are **not** acceptable to God.

Luke 18:9-14 [NIV] *“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

The prayer of the self-deceived Pharisee was **not** accepted by God.

Isaiah 58:1-5 [NIV] *“Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?”*

God, through Isaiah, denounced Israel for trying to hide their sins behind a façade of religious activities.

The result of their self-deception.

God, through Isaiah, then lifted the veil of this religious self-deception.

Isaiah 58:6-10 [NIV] *“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”*

The prayers of such a humble undeceived person will be heard.

Note the prayers were away from self to a concern for others who were in need.

Prayers and faith in God lack sincerity if they are **not** reaching out to the needs of others who do **not** yet know the Creator God.

Any other attitude to our religious life is the result of self-deception.

All too often the Christian fellowships today are self-feeding, most of the funds available used to make their fellowship and the places of worship more self-pleasing.

They are **failing** to fulfil the commission given by Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:18-20 [NIV] *“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

For Jesus Christ to be in a fellowship it **must** be totally dedicated to the fulfilling of this commission.

Outside of this is a matter of self-deception.

The blood of Jesus Christ will **only** be redemptive to a penitent sinner.

Faith in Jesus Christ will justify the sinner, but it will **never** justify a self-deceived sinner who continues in their sinful way of life.

John 8:3-11 [NIV] *“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no-one condemned you?” “No-one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”*

The last part of Christ’s conversation with the woman caught in the sin of adultery, was the most important.

No amount of pleading with God will make evil good or wrong right, to think this possible is pure self-deception.

A self-deceived person may lay for hours in “sackcloth and ashes” yet still is deceived into thinking this will persuade God to come over to their side and so they can have their own way.

A person may welter in self-accusation yet because of self-deception, refusing to give up their secret sin, will be rejected by the Creator God.

Simply put, the one quality God requires of a person before He will save them, is personal honesty about their attitude.

However dishonest a person may have been in the past, they must put away this self-deceiving duplicity if they are to be accepted by God.

James 1:7-8 [NIV] *“That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.”*

The Greek translated “double-minded” literally means “two spirited”, we are self-deceived if we think we can follow the desires of our human spirit and the Holy Spirit at the same time.

Jesus Christ can and will save a person who has been dishonest, but He **cannot** save them while they are still dishonest, still a slave to self-deception.

A simple but effective way to avoid self-deception.

Always mean what we say.

Never say what we do **not** mean.

Apply this to our relationship with other humans and God.