

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES
"The Easy And The Hard Ways To Overcome Deception"
(1 John 2:18-27; Titus 1:1-16)

Introduction: (To show the need...)

(1) Many people are being **painfully** deceived in today's world:

(a) A recent letter to the Editor of the Torrington Register-Citizen newspaper read as follows: "Prayers said for the soul as Judas Maccabees offered and recorded in 2 Maccabees 12:24 of the Old Testament can relieve the suffering of the soul (in purgatory). Jesus gave a prayer to the cloistered, Benedictine Saint Gertrude. Every time this prayer is said, 1,000 souls are released from Purgatory..." Well, the truth is that (1) prayers for the dead cannot work: one faces judgment after death for what **he** has done, not what **others** can do for him, Rev. 20:12. (2) The Maccabean writings are not Scripture! They were elevated as result of Reformation disputes by the Church. (3) Jesus ascended to heaven before the A.D. 529 Benedictine order was established so that He could not have prayed to Saint Gertrude. (4) Jesus prayed to the **Father, not** to men like Saint Gertrude! (5) Scripture is opposed to cloistering, so Jesus would not have prayed to a cloistered saint, cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-11. (6) Neither is there a basis for purgatory according to 2 Cor. 5:8. (7) There is no evidence in Scripture that 1,000 souls are released from a purgatory by a single prayer! Yet, a woman in Torrington **believes** all of this error and is praying for deceased loved ones for their eternal welfare! **What is she going to do when she gets into eternity herself?**

(b) A member of our Church called me this week asking Bible input about the practice of contacting spirits of the dead which is performed by one who thinks the practice is **upright**. In reality, the practice is a **capital** offense opposed by God in Deut. 18:10-12. It was performed by the Old Testament Canaanites for which cause God drove them out of the Promised Land! **What is this person going to do if he enters eternity and finds he was incredibly wrong?**

(2) **Believers** struggle with painful deception as well: in the 1980s, a televangelist publicly claimed that a 900 foot Christ ordered him to build a hospital in Tulsa, Oklahoma or he would die a sin unto death. Christians gave millions to keep this televangelist alive, but now the hospital he built with that money is closed due to an excess of hospital beds in Tulsa! **But what about all of those Christians who gave sacrificially to keep the televangelist alive--how do they feel now?!**

Need: "Scripture predicts that troublesome deception will plague the Church in the latter days, 2 Tim. 3:13. Well, I want to live without being deceived in order to avoid its troubles! Any suggestions?!"

- I. **Even the immature Christian has all of the spiritual tools he needs to overcome deception, 1 Jn. 2:18-20, 27.**
 - A. John wrote to immature believers, using the term *paidia* to address "the inexperienced ones" or immature "little babies" of the faith, 1 John 2:18-27 (Mitchell, Fellowship: Three Letters From John, p.70).
 - B. In this address, John revealed that these immature believers had the indwelling Holy Spirit to equip them to discern truth from error while facing false teachers, 1 Jn. 2:19-20,26-27.
 - C. We also know that the Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to teach truth to believers, 1 Cor. 2:9-10 with 2 Tim. 3:15-17.
- II. **Yet, not all Christians live by the Holy Spirit and also rely on Scripture for reality, making them susceptible to deception, 1 Cor. 2:14; 3:3; 1 John 3:7.**
- III. **Accordingly, God has a "Plan B" way, a HARDER way, to overcome deception in the church:**
 - A. The Island of Crete was known for its habitual liars, Titus 1:12-13a.
 - B. Accordingly, early Christian outreach on Crete was afflicted by whole households not using the Holy Spirit's enabling, but who carnally yielded their minds to doctrines of deceivers, Tit. 1:10-11b.
 - C. To offset this problem, God through Paul instituted "Plan B," a more difficult means of preserving the truth:
 1. Paul commanded a co-worker, Titus, to appoint godly elders in every town in Crete, Titus 1:5. Their godly examples would make their efforts credible to others, 1:6-8.
 2. These men were to be able to counter the efforts of the false teachers in a confrontational manner, Titus 1:9,13b.
 - a. The elders appointed needed to be committed enough to the Scriptures that they could confront and neutralize the false teachers, Tit. 1:9.
 - b. This effort was to include sharp rebukes by the elders to the errorists, Titus 1:13b.
 3. This plan was naturally more painful to all involved:
 - a. First of all, it was also hard on the **people** who had been deceived: they had to face the **embarrassment** of having followed error, or choose to counter godly elders and follow the error, a matter inviting divine **judgment**, cf. Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 5:19.

- b. It was hard on the ones who had **taught** error as it involved their being **publicly challenged** after matters had developed to extreme proportions, Titus 1:11b.
- c. It was also painful to the **elders** who had to **confront** and also **rebuke** deceivers **sharply**. It was difficult for them to stand for the truth in cases where they were in the **minority** position as **whole households** had converted to error, Titus 1:13b, 11b.

Application: *To offset deception, one must be indwelt by the Holy Spirit just to be equipped to discern spiritual truth, and that takes (1) believing on Christ as Savior from sin, Jn. 3:16; Ro. 8:9b. (2) To escape false teaching painlessly as a believer, one must then (a) confess any sins he commits (1 Jn. 1:9) for cleansing and control of the Holy Spirit, and then (b) lean on the Spirit for clear thinking to (c) use Scripture accurately to discern truth from error at the early stages, 1 Cor. 2:14-15. (3) If we do not heed the input of "(2)" directly above, we run the risk of being deceived and having to experience God's "Plan B" discomfort, Titus 1:5,9-11! (4) If we are spiritual, and God appoints us the challenging job of handling deception as an elder, (a) accept the task joyfully as you are working for the Chief Shepherd out of love, whether or not others understand it, 1 Pet. 5:1-4a. (b) Realize also that there is a reward for doing the job well with the proper spirit of gentleness and yet dedicated firmness, 1 Pet. 5:2-4b. (c) If you suffer persecution for doing the job, rejoice as there is a reward for that as well, Matt. 5:11-12.*

Lesson: *There are two ways to offset deception: "Plan A" involves every believer depending on the Holy Spirit to use Scripture to discern truth from error so as to resist efforts of deceivers before things get out of hand; then there is "Plan B" where God must use elders to confront deceivers directly because believers have lived carnally and followed deception to excessive proportions!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson...)

(1) In 1967, renowned Bible teacher and exemplary believer, Dr. John G. Mitchell taught us in Bible School that although he knew that the current practice of "tongues" was not Biblical, he had no proof that tongues could not occur again in the Church. However, he had noticed that every time **tongues** were present in Scripture that **Jews** were **also** present. He told us, "Someday someone will find out the divine purpose for the gift of tongues, and it will have to do with the **Jew!**"

(2) During my years in training and on into the pastorate, I was confronted by a close relative who adopted "tongues" beliefs. But I recalled Dr. Mitchell's input that the gift had to do with the **Jew**, and it helped resist that doctrine. Later, I learned that it also kept me away from many massively painful disillusionments that many dear people I know have experienced due to embracing this error!!

Israel, My Glory, I found out how true Dr. John Mitchell had been 20 years before! That article scratched that decades long "itch" created by Dr. Mitchell. It revealed that tongues were a sign to the **Jew** to fulfill Deut. 28:49 (by way of 1 Cor. 14:21f and Isa. 28:11f). There, God predicted that were Israel to violate the Mosaic Covenant and go into captivity, a people of a **Gentile** language would address them as a symbol of judgment. Israel violated Moses' command (Deut. 18:15-19) about accepting Messiah, Jesus! This is why Peter warned **Jews** in Acts 2:40 to salvage themselves from their doomed **Jewish** generation. **But since God no longer works with Israel under Mosaic Covenant, the gift of tongues must vanish between the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 until after the Rapture of the Church!** Also, I discovered that tongues had disappeared so fully by the time of Chrysostom (circa A.D. 395), for he wrote that no one was certain in his day what this gift's characteristics were like! (Homilies in First Cor., Homily XXIX, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 12:168) History thus validated Showers' article!!

By (a) heeding a **man of God** who had only partial learning at the time, and by (b) relying on **Scripture** and (c) the **Spirit's** guidance, God led into more truth without the painful results of adopting error. We need to **use** these resources for our own protection of happiness!