

14. Strong Delusion

Paul wrote, "...the working of Satan [comes] with all power, signs and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish..." (2 Ths. 2:9-10) Let us note carefully the two major characteristics of the great falling away from the faith, the apostasy, that comes just before the day of Christ's return (see 2 Ths. 2:3) – all power and all unrighteous deception. Miracles will occur. Great spiritual power will be present just as it was for Simon the sorcerer. Luke records:

"Philip went down to a city in Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city.

But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God.' And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time." (Acts 8:5-11)

It is perfectly understandable that the natural man, who cannot perceive the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14), would follow after any man who wields great spiritual powers. But let us note carefully the subtle deceptions at work. Simon the sorcerer was not directing the people to Christ and God – he was drawing followers after himself and ultimately into the power of Satan. One reason there were so many demonized people in that city may very well be because of Simon's work there. He had been so consumed with his lust for power that he had invoked demonic spirits into other people's lives as well.

The modern "pastor" – especially (but not limited to) those who dabble in the counterfeit "revivals" which seem to regularly sweep around the world these days – is no different. Whatever accurate knowledge he has of the gospel is tainted with demonic and Nicolaitan contaminants (or else he could not be the "pastor" of a "church") and the followers are drawn after himself and his or his denomination's particular version of "Christ" and the "gospel." The "pastor," preacher or traveling "apostle" or "evangelist" who traffics in supernatural power will always be able to gather followers after himself. This is nothing new.

Let us note well that Satan's end time deceptions are "unrighteous" and effective "among those who perish." (2 Ths. 2:10) Righteousness is most readily defined as being what is right in God's eyes. Unrighteousness then is anything *not* right in God's eyes. The context of this verse is the coming of lawlessness – the practice of doing what is right in one's own eyes. Jesus said that just prior to His return lawlessness would abound (Mt. 24:12) and Paul told us that righteousness (what is right in God's eyes) and lawlessness (what is right in one's own eyes) have nothing in common. (2 Cor. 6:14) The picture here is not particularly of rampant monstrously evil deeds (though these will certainly be present in the world) but rather that most who proclaim to belong to Christ will not be pursuing His will for their life but will instead be busy pursuing whatever seems right and good in their own eyes. Thus, if a "church" practice or denominational "theology" seems good to them, they will submit themselves to that "pastor" or to that institutionalized "church" system – and to the demonic beings enmeshed behind the scenes.

Paul goes on to say, "...those who perish...did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved." (2 Ths. 2:10) The whole of the institutional "church" system hinges on the idea that each individual should choose which variation of denominational "theology" or practice which suits his or her own individual tastes and preferences. If you like pomp, rituals, robes and a serene spiritual, religious experience, try the Catholic sect. If you want an exuberant charismatic experience where you can be "free in the Spirit," try the Vineyard sect or the hyper-charismatic denominations. If you want to be intellectually stimulated in a teaching/lecture environment, try the Calvary Chapel sect or any of its imitators. But if all you want is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but God's truth, don't expect to remain welcome long at any of these places. These places are the niches designed to ensnare the unwary who settle in for whatever is right in their own eyes and who neglect to press on past that to discover and attain to what is right in God's eyes. The gospel – the truth, the love and the real power that draws men to the real Christ Jesus and God the Father of light – remains veiled to those who are perishing (2 Cor. 4:3) even though they be strong, faithful adherents to their own "church" and its ideologies and practices. Only those who love the truth – and Jesus and His Spirit *are* the truth (Jn. 14:6, 1 Jn. 5:6) – will be saved in the face of the unrighteous deception of the end times.

Paul continues, "And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Ths. 2:11-12) Because the people are quite content to sit in this self-constructed, comfortable midway point between being of the world and following God, God Himself will unleash strong delusion upon them so that they will take their rightful place among those who are condemned to perish. But if it is impossible for God to lie (Num. 23:19, Heb. 6:18, 1 Jn. 2:21), how will this strong delusion come from God?

There is a similar picture given in the Old Testament when the Lord decreed that it was time for the wicked king of Israel, Ahab, to die in fulfillment of other prophecies already spoken about his death. Micaiah, a genuine prophet of God, after all the king's prophets had promised victory, spoke the word of the Lord, saying, "The LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours, and the LORD has declared disaster against you." (1 Ki. 22:23) And even though Ahab (probably in direct reaction to this word of the Lord) disguised himself and did not go into battle in his place as the king of Israel, a random arrow struck him down any way and he died in complete fulfillment of all the prophecies given. (1 Ki. 22:37-38)

So too will the apostasy, the great falling away from the faith, take its sad place in human history. Through the lying spirits that are in the mouths of almost all of today's popular "pastors," teachers and preachers – in fulfillment of Paul's warning that the people would reject sound doctrine and instead heap up ear-tickling and ear-scratching teachers so that they can turn away from the truth and listen to fables and stories instead (2 Tim. 4:3-4) – many will come under strong delusion so that they might believe the lie. Which lie will they believe? Whichever lie they prefer over and above what is right and true in God's eyes. This preference of some lie above God's righteousness *is* the pleasure in unrighteousness which causes God to be so nauseated that He sends the strong delusion that cements them in the trajectory they have chosen for themselves and their lives.

This is the condition epitomized by the Laodicean ekklesia (another picture of the people of the end times). Jesus told John to write,

"Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of

nothing' – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked..." (Rev. 3:16-17)

Though the people claim to belong to Christ, He will reject them because they have neither desire nor ability to discern the truth about themselves and their real need for a Savior who would clean them, purify them and heal them if they would only turn from their ridiculous opinion (conceit) that they have no need for any such things. These are those which God has declared in His anger that they will never partake of His eternal life. (see Lk. 14:21-24)

The delusion God sends on the end time people who are perishing is strong precisely because it is a false knowledge which caters to the very human propensity toward self-centeredness, selfishness, arrogance and conceit. (see 1 Cor. 8:1) It is a lie (which the demonic will alter and tailor to fit each particular individual) which appeals to some aspect of the individual's tastes, preferences and personality. For some it will be a strong desire for religious order and structure but apart from personal obedience to God. For others it will be such a strong independence that no corporate unity with Christ and His true followers will be possible. Yet others will strongly desire to control the religious order and structure to the point that the Spirit and life of Christ are quenched and excluded as uncontrollable and unpredictable. Still others will reject various truths brought to life by the Spirit of God because obeying those truths would simply be too uncomfortable or too costly. And others, in their arrogance and conceit, will simply "know" these kinds of things to be true so therefore it could not possibly happen to them but could only happen to that group "over there."

Anything that the individual holds as of greater worth or value than what is right in God's eyes will be the vantage point whereby the demonic will exert its strong delusion over those "Christians" who do not love the truth and who are in reality perishing. This *is* the perilous nature of the end times! (2 Tim. 3:1)

To be saved during this time of demonic power and deception will require endurance. (Mt. 24:13) Our love for the truth – and the truth is a Person, not just some list of dogmas, ideas, doctrines and theologies – must be stronger than our personal preferences for all the things which the demonic might use against us. Long ago, God, in the context of ridiculing all of men's efforts to build Him a suitable habitation, said,

"But on this one will I look [with favor]: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word. [But] he who kills a bull [a required sacrifice for sin under the Law] as if he slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, as if he breaks a dog's neck; he who offers a grain offering, as if he offers swine's blood; he who burns incense, as if he blesses an idol. Just as they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, so will I choose their delusions, and bring their fears on them; because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke they did not hear; but they did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight." (Isa. 66:2-4)

The institutionalizing of the "church" which produces the great apostasy is really the same story as the traditionalizing of Judaism which produced the rejection and murder of the Messiah. The human heart, apart from the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, will always become hardened and resist the way and work of God. (Rom. 8:7, Acts 7:51, etc.) When carnal men (any who obey anything other than what is right, true and pure in God's eyes) band together and form an organized

religion, the result can only be an abomination in God's eyes. Whether one under the Old Covenant practiced the Mosaic law apart from a heart pure before God or one under the New Covenant attends "church" apart from a heart pure before God, it is the same thing in God's eyes: abomination. Only faith which results in personal obedience to God is acceptable in His eyes. (see Gal. 5:6)

"Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." (Psa. 127:1) All the efforts throughout history to build God a building – especially the physical "church" buildings and all the errant attempts to practice "church" on any terms and conditions other than His (i.e., Nicolaitan authority, institutional system, etc., in contrast to His simple, abundant life through and by His Spirit) - will prove to be eternally disastrous for all who partake. The one who still trembles at God's word, who recognizes his own inherent poverty, weakness, handicaps and limitations and who is content to walk under the direct Headship and Kingship of Christ Jesus (co-laboring with Him as *He* builds His ekklesia – Mt. 16:18) will not come under any delusion and will persevere to the end so as to be saved. This *is* - and always has been! – the gospel of the kingdom of Christ and God.

Let he who has ears hear.

Chapter 13: The Voice of Strangers

<http://paidionbooks.org/girard/tgotk/13tvos.pdf>

Chapter 15: The Right Answer

<http://paidionbooks.org/girard/tgotk/15tra.pdf>