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Can You Be Deceived? Why People Are Duped and How Not to Be

by G. Richard Fisher

“Will you walk into my parlor?” said a spider to a fly; ‘Tis the prettiest little parlor that you ever did spy” (Mary Howitt).

The inspired Apostle Paul warned us: “Let no one deceive you” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). It is apparent that we are vulnerable to deception and we must not forget it. We must be on guard and protect ourselves against it. There is deception everywhere in the religious world. We *must* be alert.

Deception can only deceive if it looks somewhat like the real thing. Apologist Craig Hawkins explains:

“We must realize that the way to deceive people with counterfeits is to imitate the genuine article as closely as possible. For example, if counterfeiters want to pass off fake one-hundred-dollar bills, they do not print Donald Duck’s picture on purple paper. Instead they attempt to duplicate a true bill. Similarly, despicable persons who try to deceive others attempt to appear genuine and sincere. They do not walk up to you and inform you that they are there to deceive and defraud you. The far more effective method is faking friendship and fidelity.”¹



Goethe taught that we are never deceived but that we deceive ourselves. It is true that religious huck-

sters are believed because people want to believe them. People want the claims to be true. One of Martin Luther’s favorite sayings was “*mundus vult decipi*” — the world wants to be deceived.

Once a person has invested blood, sweat, tears and *money* into religious deception, he may be too embarrassed or too stubborn to admit he has been taken. Our hearts are where our treasure has gone. Our vested interest helps us keep the blinders on. We often only “see” what we want to see. The Bible presents a complex picture in regard to deception and assures us that God holds both the deceiver and the deceived accountable.

In the first chapter of the book of Zephaniah, the Lord charges and convicts both the people and the corrupt leaders they followed. Lamentations 2:14 indicates the same:

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38. Norman L. Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man?* Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997, pg. 96.
39. See further, *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, op. cit., pg. 946.
40. Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1999, pg. 577.
41. William Watkins, *Christian Research Journal*, "A Summary Critique," Fall 1993, pg. 43.
42. Ronald Nash calls Process theology a dangerous heresy and in a phone conversation (2/4/00) with this author, Dr. Jay Adams branded Process theology as heresy.
43. Watkins, "A Summary Critique," op. cit., pg. 44.
44. John Piper, "Is the Glory of God at Stake in God's Foreknowledge of Human Choices? Jonathan Edwards' Response to Gregory Boyd," July 1998. This article is available on Desiring God Ministries web site (<http://www.desiringgod.org>).
45. *Ibid.*, italic in original.
46. "God, Foreknowledge and the Baptist General Conference." This multi-page document is available online at: <http://www.opentheism.org/resolution.htm>.
47. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 9.
48. John Armstrong, editor, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996, pg. 140.
49. *Ibid.*, pg. 139.
50. R.K. McGregor Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996, pg. 226.
51. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 53.
52. *Ibid.*, pg. 54.
53. *Ibid.*, pg. 44.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
55. *Ibid.*, pg. 49.
56. *Ibid.*, pg. 35.
57. *Ibid.*, pg. 61.
58. *Ibid.*, pg. 43.
59. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*, op. cit., pg. 177.
60. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 98.
61. *Ibid.*, pg. 133.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.
63. For a more balanced view of sin, suffering and evil, we recommend the following: *The Power of Suffering* by John MacArthur, *As Silver Refined* by Kay Arthur, *When God Weeps* by Joni Eareckson Tada and *Why Would a Good God Allow Suffering?* by Martin R. DeHaan II.
64. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 57.
65. *Ibid.*, pg. 115.
66. *Battle of the Gods*, op. cit., pg. 10.
67. Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, pp. 345-347, italics in original.
68. See for example, "Foreknowledge, Foreordination," *Insight on the Scriptures*. Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., Vol. 1, 1988, pp. 851-860.
69. See *The Watchtower*, August 1, 1970, pg. 471.
70. See *The Watchtower*, June 1, 1953, pg. 341.
71. *Creating God in the Image of Man?*, op. cit., pp. 108, 111, 133, emphasis in original.
72. George Foot Moore, *Judaism*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Vol. 1, 1960, pg. 455.
73. *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, op. cit., pg. 142.
74. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 115.
75. *Clarke's Commentaries*, op. cit., Vol 5, pg. 702, emphasis in original.
76. *Ibid.*, emphasis in original.
77. *Ibid.*, pg. 703.
78. *Battle of the Gods*, op. cit., pg. 18.

CAN YOU BE DECEIVED?

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"Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; They have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions."

It seems that for many complex reasons, one of which is the spurious idea of ongoing revelation (along with a diminished view of the sufficiency of the Bible), many people are predisposed to credulity. That is, they are gullible and likely ready to believe anything even on very slight evidence or sometimes with no evidence at all. Testimonials and dramatic stories sell.

The Bible does not go into a lot of intricate detail as to the psychology of deception; it does not have to. What it does is give us warning about its reality and specific instruction on how to deal with it.

The words deceit, deceitful, deceitfully, deceitfulness, deceive, and deceptibility are used again and again

in the Bible. It is one of the major themes. There are warnings everywhere in Scripture about being deceived. There are numerous warnings about the users and purveyors of deceit. The underlying Greek words for deceit cover everything from self-deceit to the practice of deceit by unprincipled religious teachers and con artists. So we are warned repeatedly and must be ready (2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-14).

Deceit is defined as:

"1. The act of representing as true what is known to be false; a deceiving or lying. 2. a dishonest action or trick; fraud or lie. 3. the quality of being deceitful."²

British scholar W.E. Vine defines the Greek words *apate* and *dolos* that underlie the various English words for deceit:

"APATE ... to cheat, deceive, beguile, that which gives a false impression, whether by appearance, statement or influence ... In Col. 2:8, 'vain deceit' suggests that deceit is void of anything

profitable. ... DOLOS ... primarily a bait, snare; hence, craft, deceit, guile."³

UNHOLY WATER

Fiction writer Robert Rosenberg captures the concept of deceit in his first mystery novel, *Crimes of the City*. Detective Avram Cohen is the lead character and is investigating the murder of two nuns in Ein Kerem, west of Jerusalem. A Messianic rabbi, Ovadia, who is using his religious influence to cover drug running, is described by Cohen:

"The only real difference seems to be that he figured out that if he calls it religion, he can get away with things. He's playing the saint, selling blessed water from a faucet."⁴

So, deceitful men get away with things under the guise of religion and playing the saint while they sell worthless panaceas. Years ago we would call them "snake oil salesmen."

To help us in our study, first we need to see...

THE REALITY OF DECEPTION

Y2K scams proliferated and people were being bilked out of money through the selling of fear and paranoia. Internet myths are being circulated and are growing like fungus. One can be "ordained" over the Internet for no charge in 20 seconds. And, for what it is worth, there is an assortment of "degrees" that you can purchase. The myth that U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno promoted (on the news program *60 Minutes*) a definition of "cult" that included evangelical believers was actually believed and proliferated even though it has been debunked. For the last 25-plus years, PFO has and continues to get pleas in regard to the bogus Madalyn Murray O'Hair/FCC petition. Other FCC stories continue to mutate and circulate.

The vanishing hitchhiker is still showing up regularly in evangelists' stories. And then there's the missing day, hell found and tape recorded in a Siberia cavern and, let's not forget, Procter and Gamble's sellout to Satan. All of these reports are still making the rounds. Rumors are fascinating and they do sell. There are so many myths and urban legends that retired English professor Jan Harold Brunvand has put together, *The Colossal Book of Urban Legends* with the main title being, "Too Good To Be True." Myth-debunking has spawned a whole industry for that genre of books.

The title of a new study of urban legends by Brunvand (and published by the University of Illinois Press) really underscores the susceptibility to hearsay: "The Truth Never Stands in the Way of a Good Story!"

Charismatics in Toronto (and elsewhere) are passing off as gold what has tested out to be cheap glitter. Also there has been the planting of feathers that are claimed to be the work of angels. Hokey pictures — and just plain bad photography — with fire superimposed on crowds of people is supposed to prove the new "baptism of fire."

Even heartwarming stories from seemingly sincere men can be used to

deceive. Paul warned us: "But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13).

IT'S IN THE BOOK — A LOT

Remember that Satan duped Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3). The Israelites followed the impostor Korah to their own destruction (Numbers 16). Saul was drawn in and deceived by the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28). Jeremiah warned of false and wicked "shepherds" who would deceive and destroy the sheep (Jeremiah 23). We can be easily seduced if we do not hold on to and really know God's Word.

Kathryn Lindskoog has astutely commented that "Some Protestants love any heartwarming stories that seem to authenticate the Bible, whether they are true or not."⁵ There is no end of undocumented stories and claims by modern pied pipers.

There are so many Christian myths and urban legends accepted as fact in the Church that it is embarrassing. In some instances they are harmless, in other instances they are costly and even deadly. However, the world looks at the gullibility and silliness of some professing Christians and mocks. We lose the battle because of the effects of our being deceived and looking ridiculous.

The Old Testament constantly exposes the cons. We are shown the magicians in Moses' day who could fake the miracles of Moses (up to a point, Exodus 8 and 2 Timothy 3). Jacob's tricking and scheming are laid out. Laban is exposed. In Isaiah 30:10 the people cried: "prophesy illusions."

The book of Proverbs warns again and again about deceit, false balances, being taken in by deception whether in the moral realm, or the everyday realm of life and practical living. The Bible repeatedly insists on truth, calls us to truth, demands truth.

Jesus in Matthew 7:15 warns of false prophets and Paul in Acts 20:29-30 warns about "grievous wolves" who will not spare the flock.

WHOPPERS DELUXE

The deceivers are getting more shameless all the time. Inner-City Christian Discernment Ministry reports on Rod Parsley's "Whopper." Parsley sent his constituents a letter dated April 2, 1999, in which he claimed to heal a man of full-blown AIDS. No name, address or documentation was given. It was just a tall tale.

Joan Gieson, who served for many years at Benny Hinn Miracle Crusades doing stage introductions of the "healed," reported at one of Hinn's meetings that the woman on stage had been thrown out of a automobile, hit by three cars, run over by a tractor trailer, was taken to the morgue, marked DOA with a tag put on her big toe. The lady stood there looking like she was in a drug stupor. No documentation, proof or medical records were offered — just wild claims.

Marilyn Hickey is selling anointed red rubber bands to wear on the wrist for seven days for only \$10.00. In the past she has offered blessed pennies, miracle carrot seeds and magical healing cloths. It is a travesty.

Former "signs and wonders" leg lengthener, C. Peter Wagner, reports stories that in Argentina people lose large amounts of weight in the meetings and that bald men grow hair. Again no proof, no documentation, no witnesses, no specimens. We are told if we do prayer walks, demons will flee out of their geographical strongholds. If this was true the demon busters could have taken back all the ZIP codes from Satan years ago.

IT JUST IS NOT WORKING!

Inner-City Christian Discernment Ministry has also posted information on just how physically sick modern healers get. These healers also regularly seek medical attention for themselves and their family. It is one of their best-kept secrets although the facts are slowly leaking out.

In ICCDM's report entitled "It's Not Working For Them Either!" they chronicle:

• the deaths of John Wimber and his son Chris, both of whom died of cancer;

• E.W. Kenyon died in a coma with a malignant tumor;

• John Osteen sought medical help for his wife Dodie's cancer;

• Word-Faith publisher Buddy Harrison died of cancer;

• Fred Price got chemotherapy for his wife. He did not name it and claim it.

Further, ICCDM reminds us that Jamie Buckingham died of cancer and Charles Capps' wife got medical treatment for her cancer, as did Joyce Meyer. Mack Timberlake is getting medical attention for throat cancer and healer R.W. Shambach, who regularly tells his gullible followers, "You don't have any problems, all you need is faith in God," has had a quadruple bypass. Add to that, Prophet Keith Grayton who died of AIDS complications, Kenneth Hagin's sister who died of cancer, Hagin's wife who was operated on and Hagin himself who wears glasses and you begin to see the hypocrisy.

The list goes on and on. Kathryn Kuhlman died of heart disease. A.A. Allen died from alcohol abuse and Aimee Semple McPherson died from an overdose of barbiturates. John Lake died of a stroke and Gordon Lindsey of a heart condition. Daisy Osborn died of cancer that she claimed was healed. How does one explain this since all the above claim healing powers and special visitations from God? Self-deluded? Or just deluding others?

What about the other "miracle workers"? Robert Tilton dealt with lawsuits, lies and divorces while he collected millions. Peter Popoff was exposed by the secular world as a fraud when it was revealed his "words of knowledge" were received through an electronic earpiece. Leroy Jenkins was convicted for tax fraud. Jimmy Swaggert is a serial adulterer and multimillionaire. W.V. Grant was jailed for tax fraud and has divorced his wife. The world of televangelists is a sick, dysfunctional and sinful world.

These people claim that they have seen Jesus, seen angels, have extraordinary powers, are the anointed of God and the recipients of direct revelation. *Charisma* magazine touts them as Christian leaders, apostles and miracle workers and tries to give them credibility through smoke and mirrors using fantastic stories, unproven claims and slick advertisements. It is such a sham. Based on the above it should not be hard for the reader to decide what is really going on.

REAL JEWELS

Kathryn Kuhlman gave false hope, which is worse than no hope at all. Quadriplegic Joni Eareckson Tada recounts her experiences:

"And so, when I was released from the hospital, my friends would drive me to Washington, D.C., so I could be first in line at the door whenever the famous faith-healer, Kathryn Kuhlman, came to town. Miss Kuhlman breezed onto the stage in her white gown, and my heart raced as I prayed, *Lord, the Bible says you heal all our diseases. I'm ready for you to get me out of this wheelchair. Please would you?*"⁶

Tada goes on:

"God answered: I never walked away from my chair. The last time I wheeled away from a Kathryn Kuhlman crusade, I was number fifteen in a line of thirty wheelchair-users waiting to exit at the stadium elevator, all of us trying to make a fast escape ahead of the people on crutches. I remember glancing around at all the disappointed and confused people and thinking, *Something's wrong with this picture. Is this the only way to deal with suffering? Trying to desperately remove it?*"⁷

Wheelchairs in a meeting are incredible props and powerful symbolic tools even if nothing happens. They create great effect for healers. W.V. Grant used to truck them in for effect. In Canada, architects have hung them on the pillars at St. Anne's Church in perfect symmetry.

When the chips are down, the "biggest" names don't come through — Oral Roberts prayed for Kathryn Kuhlman in the hospital twice. She was resuscitated by hospital staff twice but the enlarged heart she carried for more than 20 years finally gave out. Kuhlman pulled in an income of \$1 million a year and died with a vault full of jewels.⁸ Joni Eareckson Tada will get her jewels in heaven.

Tada shares the sad aftermath of the healing crusades:

"I wonder how many of those sullen-faced folks at the elevator after the healing crusade still believe in God? That was almost thirty years ago. Are they still waiting in line? Still hoping? 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick,' and a heart can break only so many times."⁹

Faith healer Benny Hinn, who claims to receive "anointings" at the grave sites of Kuhlman and McPherson, has fostered deceptions that are crass and blatant but very well-documented. His claims of surviving a plane crash unscathed do not match up with the law enforcement report which details the accident. The heroin-overdose deaths within his own organization show his impotence. His constant threats of lawsuits and cursing of detractors' children show his spiritual bankruptcy. His claims of raising the dead have all been shown to be lies.

The banter can even turn rude, crude, vile and vulgar. Take the comments of Hinn's wife, Suzanne, who is now "ministering" with her husband: "You need a Holy Ghost enema," she told her former Orlando congregation. The rest we will leave out. Shortly after that she charged back and forth across the stage hollering into the microphone and did a big belly flop on stage to the howling delight of her audience.

Clips of the above were run on Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* for all the world to see and ridicule.¹⁰ It has provided Hinn with another black monetary hole of legal expenses in his empty threats of lawsuits against the

network and *The Daily Show* producers. It gives every Christian a bad name.

According to 1 Timothy 3:4-5, an elder is to rule his house well. If he cannot rule his house, he cannot rule the Church. At the very least Hinn could have his wife apologize, clean up her act and stop belly-flopping on stage.

How the shocking banter of Mrs. Hinn must grieve the Holy Spirit. Her husband at times has threatened those who disagree with him with suggestions that they are blaspheming the Holy Spirit. He even once called for a "Holy Ghost machine gun" to blow off the heads of his detractors. However, the suggestions of his wife may be very near blaspheming or at least seriously degrading and mocking the Holy Spirit. Yet there has not been an outcry from Hinn's following.

Is the Charismatic world getting so jaded that nothing shocks it any more? Hinn has gone from getting an anointing at graveyards to full-blown necromancy (added to his lies and false prophecies) and his crowds only get bigger.¹¹

One of the ways deception is promoted is by the terrible misuse and twisting of Scripture to try to shore up wild claims.

There has been a constant misuse of Jeremiah 31:22, "for the Lord has created a new thing in the earth." We have been told that each new excess is that "new thing." Holy laughter was described as the new thing. Various "revivals" and bodily manifestations were touted as the new thing. Some are claiming the new thing is yet to arrive.

CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

Invariably, cults spawn false doctrine by using proof texts out of context. Extremists were saying that revival was sweeping the land and we could expect to see anything because God was going to do a new thing. But just as Peter warned, they are twisting the Scriptures to say that the new thing is anything they pro-

claim it to be, no matter how wild or weird.

The "new thing" is foretold in Jeremiah 31:22. In verse 31, the "new thing" is clearly expounded and explained as follows, "Behold the days are coming says the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel." So the new thing is *the New Covenant*.

Charismatic extremism, I believe, is trying to rob us of the new covenant. Keil and Delitzsch work out all the contextual nuances in the Hebrew text of Jeremiah 31 and conclude that the new thing is not some emotional experience, but that "Herein is expressed a new relation of Israel to the Lord, a reference to a new covenant which the Lord, ver. 31ff., will conclude with His people."¹²

The so-called "new thing" of frenzies, manifestations, spastic fits, and out-of-control emotions is, in fact, not new at all but a reproduction of bizarre behavior that cropped up in the Church periodically and was soundly condemned when it did. Whether it be the Camisard "prophets" of 1706 or the other outbreaks of the 18th century, strong words were used against the excesses and the Bible upheld as the only source of truth.¹³

Having seen the reality of deception we need to try to understand secondly, the roots of deception.

WHYS OF GULLIBILITY

Why are Christians so gullible and so prone to deception? What could possibly be behind it?

First, because the foundation of the Christian life is belief. However, that we can believe the wrong things is made abundantly clear by the Bible. We must know what we believe and why and that we are believing the right things. We cannot just believe anything. Our objects of faith must be God and His Word, not mere men or wild claims. Dr. Bruce Bickel reminds us:

"Too often what passes for unity is really compromise. It is better to be divided by truth than united in error."¹⁴

Second, the Christian is commanded to love. Love tends to be accepting and is willing to overlook. However, love that is not structured in truth is sentimentalism and is so wishy-washy it can be manipulated and led astray.

We cannot confuse love and emotionalism or love and feelings. Love is a commitment to truth and the highest good of others. Love does, as Scripture attests, "cover a multitude of sins."¹⁵ At times, that love means bringing a sinner back from the error of his ways.¹⁶ Love will not tolerate false teachings or lies which in the end hurt and destroy others. Biblical love insists on truth and true doctrine. Bickel has the correct take on love:

"Love, true love, cannot be divorced from truth. Scripture is quite clear that love rejoices in the truth! One cannot claim to love when one is not concerned about truth. The truth of Scripture must be the concern of one who truly loves."¹⁷

Third, we have a tendency to want to believe Christian leaders and Hebrews 13:7 indicates that generally we should. However the verse alerts us to be aware of their conduct as well. So it is not a blind following. Is the leadership we are following really modeling Christ and the Bible? Paul said we are to follow him "*as he followed Christ*." As commendable as it is to love and trust our leaders, we still have to be Bereans (Acts 17:11) and test *all* messages against Scripture. We do our leaders a great service by being mutually accountable. Leaders are vulnerable without the help and balance of others.

Fourth, we can be brainwashed by religious television and are being told that to question is "heresy hunting" or it is a "religious spirit" or "white cane religion" or a "Jezebel spirit" or worse. We are cowed by being threatened with the possibility of committing the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit even though we are just trying to be discerning. We should not be manipulated by a turning of the tables and a guilt trip laid on us for questioning heresy. We should not be

in a church where there is no accountability or church discipline. In that setting, unrepentant sinners and autocrats are "above the law."

Regrettably, very little stress is being put on the gift of discernment. All Christians are called to be discerning. We must check things out (1 John 4:1-6). More credibility needs to be given to legitimate countercult organizations (and their struggle and sacrifice) so that "iron can sharpen iron." Good apologetic groups not only expose error, they keep teaching truth and keep laying a good foundation of doctrine which is so desperately needed today.

Fifth, it is hard for us to believe or imagine that slick magazines such as *Charisma* could be peddling deception and that such wonderful ministries (as being advertised) could not be on the up and up. It is hard for us to believe that "Christian" bookstores could be part of the problem. It is hard for us to believe that all the money being made is the reason for the collusion (and the advancement of the wild and weird). It is amazing that books teaching occult doctrine are now being marketed as "Christian classics."

Sixth, perverted and unbiblical views that forgiveness means we put up with and overlook everything, even ongoing sin and disgrace. The word "repentance" is being milked and used to justify all manner of evil. True repentance will issue out in biblical change (Matthew 3:8, Acts 26:20, 2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 indicate that continuing sin and false teaching is not to be dealt with by forgiveness (unless there is repentance) but by a process of church discipline with a view to restoration. Love covering a multitude of sin cannot be taken to mean that we dump our blankets in the cesspool rather than try to clean it up.

Seventh, there is an enemy of our souls who goes about like a "roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8). Satan is a master deceiver and we are called to put on the armor of God and confront his reasonings and errors and bring our

thoughts into captivity and in alignment to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Albert Barnes says it so well:

"Every power of thought in the heathen world; all the systems of philosophy, and all forms of opinion among men; all the purposes of the soul; all the powers of reason, memory, judgment, fancy, in an individual, were all to come under the laws of Christ. All *doctrines* were to be in accordance with his will; philosophy should no longer control them, but they should be subject to the will of Christ. ... All the *emotions and feelings of the heart* should be controlled by him, and led by him as a captive is led by a victor. ... The strongholds of philosophy, heathenism, and sin should be demolished, and all the opinions, plans, and purposes of the world should become subject to the all-conquering Redeemer."¹⁸

Eighth, the Scriptures predict there would be a departure from the faith because of seducing spirits and doctrines of demons and that people would opt for myths and fables over the truth (1 Timothy 4:1-2, 2 Timothy 4:1-4). Jesus warned of deception in Matthew 24:24.

Though this writer does not agree with everything Helmut Thielicke taught, his words at the end of World War II come to mind:

"In our time we have come far too much in contact with demonic powers, we have sensed and seen much too clearly how mysterious and abysmal forces have seduced people and entire movements and steered them [in a direction] they themselves did not desire; we have all too often observed how an alien spirit has taken hold of people who had perhaps been quite nice and reasonable before."¹⁹

Ninth, because we are being conditioned by our culture and television, we have lost the ability to blush. Everything and anything is paraded before us in the media as being permissible for our mental diet. Mur-

der, immorality, shock radio, abuse, perversion — nothing is off-limits. Nothing shocks us or grieves us. Our culture is becoming satiated and dulled and we are affected. Young people are piercing, branding and mutilating their bodies. Some seek even vampirism as an option.

Some in the Charismatic world need still more frenzy, wilder manifestations and altered states of consciousness to satisfy and then they keep going back for more "anointings." They are spiritually and emotionally jaded. They are hooked not on heroin but on adrenalin. So many are addicted to emotions and emotional highs. Many burn out spiritually in their quest.

Tenth, we have become a culture of hero-worshippers and celebrity-seekers. Evangelical heroes and popular writers and speakers dictate, are given total allegiance and followed like rock stars. Like the Corinthians, we say we are of Paul and Apollos and Cephas (1 Corinthians 3:4). People have been led to believe that only the "biggies" carry the "anointing." And if you want "it" you've got to come to them to receive it. "Fresh," "Fire," "New Wine" and every other brand and flavor of anointing are available to the Christian consumer.

Eleventh, we have substituted entertainment and "television religion" for a growing and intense serving relationship in a healthy, well-balanced church. Being in the presence of growing Christians in a doctrinally sound church is a wonderful reality check needed by all. Vibrant fellowship (including worship and Bible study) is an antidote to illusion and deception. We are full of blind spots and need others to help us make up areas in our pockets of deficiency and ignorance. Stray sheep are not only arrogant, they are very vulnerable.

Proverbs 27:17 forcefully reminds us: "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." To stay sharp, balanced and informed, one must take the words of Hebrews 10:23-25 very seriously and be a vital part of a vital fellowship. People have abandoned the church looking for a supernatural quick fix.

Twelfth, people have become “cliché-bound.” They are gullible and become easily subservient if someone says, “God told me,” or “the Lord said,” or “the Lord spoke to me,” or “the Lord impressed upon me.” After all, who can argue with God? The Church finds itself drowning in a sea of subjectivism away from the safe moorings of the objective Word of God! “I feel” and “I sense” have come to replace, “It is written.”

The power of the cliché is explained by Peter Berger:

“Once a cliché is firmly established in the minds of a particular group of people, it attains the quality of taken-for-granted truth and is very difficult to dislodge even by clear empirical counter-evidence. Human beings do not like to be confronted with what the psychologists call cognitive dissonance (“I have made up my mind; don’t confuse me with the facts”). What is more, thinking in general and rethinking in particular are fairly painful processes, and most people prefer to avoid this pain. The plausibility of a cliché does not depend on the amount or the quality of the evidence for it, but on the way it meets the social and psychic needs of a particular situation.”²⁰

WORTHY IS THE LAMB

Tony Evans reminds us that Jesus is the only “celebrity” worthy of our total allegiance: “... human celebrities dim and pass from the scene. But one celebrity has glory that will never dim, and His fame will never decrease. He is, in fact, the only truly worthy celebrity in the universe.”²¹

Watchman Fellowship cited an *Evangelical Press* story on rumors and why Christians are prone to believe hoaxes and strange stories. The *EP* article offered the following four reasons:

“• They fit our worldview about spiritual warfare. • We don’t always take time to check them out. • They may seem to make sense to us. • We place too much

faith in things said by ‘experts.’”²²

So we can add those to the above list of twelve reasons.

In the end, the book of Revelation tells us (22:15) that those who practice deceit and falsehood will be outside of heaven and warns about adding or taking away from the Book, in other words manipulating even the words of God.

DECEPTION DOWN SOUTH

Take, for instance, what has been going on at Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Fla. Just about every week for more than five years there have been evening meetings held through the week (although fewer and fewer now). Pentecostal sign-seekers have come from all over the country to get the “anointing” or to “get in the river.” Occasionally, they claim to be unleashing even more powerful anointings. Many criticisms have been leveled at the leadership of Pensacola by counterculture groups and through the award-winning investigative reporting of the city’s newspaper, the *Pensacola News Journal*. Some (but not all) of the criticisms revolve around:

- Personal fortunes in the millions accumulated by the leaders.

- A “revival” is being vigorously marketed and the techniques cloned.

- Constant lies about the depth and extent of the “revival” with the local community unchanged and abortion and crime rates going up in Pensacola. Everything is overhyped and embellished.

- The manipulation of numerous individuals as the leaders promote and orchestrate mass hysteria, altered states of consciousness, frenzies, pandemonium, and what is more like a pagan ashram than a church. Emotion is valued over reason and order. Manifestations are the driving force. Frenzy is “in.”

- Teachings inconsistent with the Bible.

- Extravagant claims by speakers claiming to miraculously multiply food and to raise the dead with

absolutely no documentation or proof. The same speaker claimed to do “Holy Ghost car washes” by driving his vehicle underwater.²³ Blowing a ram’s horn to chase the devil out of town is advocated. Videos professing such nonsense are marketed and sold by those within the revival.

The events at Brownsville have been called a “revival” by the principal leaders. Michael Brown has been referred to as the “theologian of the revival.” In Brown’s very own words what is going on in Pensacola *cannot* be called revival. By Brown’s *own definition* the events at Brownsville are not a revival at all! Brown’s own criteria judge Brownsville pandemonium as less than true revival.

In his book, *From Holy Laughter to Holy Fire*, Brown defines revival:

“What is revival? It is God ‘stepping down from heaven’ and baring His holy arm. He comes and acts and speaks. There is a holy Presence and a word on fire. God is in the midst of His people. The Lord is shaking the world. That is revival! It is a time of visitation. If it is confined to one church, it is not revival. If it is confined to the meetings themselves, it is not revival. If it can all be traced to the efforts of man, it is not revival. *If it does not ultimately affect the society, it is not revival.*”²⁴

BROWNOUT IN BROWNSVILLE

Then Brown goes on to insist that to be called true revival it has to change American culture. Consider this criteria: “As long as homosexuals march brazenly down our streets and serve in leading positions in our governments ... we are not experiencing revival!”²⁵

During the recent Memorial Day weekend, Pensacola again had annual lesbian and gay festivities and last fall “the nation’s first gay and lesbian bank” opened in Pensacola.

But Brown continues with:

“... as long as abortion clinics and pornography theaters thrive; as long as ‘Christian’ young

people watch MTV and 'Christian' adults watch HBO; as long as the jails have too many prisoners and the mission fields have too few laborers; as long as greed and materialism rule most of the world and much of the church; as long as humanists, new agers, and atheists dominate our college faculties; as long as these things are at the forefront of our society, we are not experiencing revival! Sweeping revival in America would mean upheaval. *The holy Presence would change the complexion of our nation dramatically.*"²⁶

Why has Brown been calling meetings at Pensacola "revival" when by his own definition it's not revival? He will have to eat his own words. What has been going on at Brownsville Assembly *cannot be called revival by Brown's own criteria.* Our Lord's words in Matthew 7:2 have significance here.

Truly, Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola could be called "The home of the whoppers." The *Pensacola News Journal* caught Pastor John Kilpatrick flatfooted with a few of his tall tales:

"Kilpatrick also told the journalist covering his appearance in Arizona that Alabama Gov. Fob James was saved at the Brownsville revival and that the governor is a regular revival attendee. James' office says otherwise. David Azbell, spokesman for James, said the governor is an Episcopalian and has never attended the revival."²⁷

There is even more of this elastic tale:

"Kilpatrick also said in Arizona that U.S. Rep. Joe Scarborough, R-Pensacola, was saved at the revival. A spokesman for Scarborough, who is a Southern Baptist, said the congressman attended only two Brownsville Revival services."²⁸

How can real revival be based on myths, lies and made up stories? It is utter nonsense to suggest that the "Spirit of truth" is spawning lies.

It appears now that Brownsville's five-year run is significantly winding

down with evangelist and key player Steven Hill moving to Dallas and the Awake America road show cooling off.²⁹

Having seen the reality of deception and having delved into the roots of deception, we must now consider *the remedy for deception.*

WISE, NOT GULLIBLE

How can Christians guard against being swindled and deceived? How can they keep themselves from following the masses into error and deception? It is not by being paranoid but by being sharp. *They must be SHARP and stay SHARP.*

S-H-A-R-P

S — Search the Scriptures daily. Know the Word of God and read it in context. Hosea 4:6 says: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." We need to be constantly hiding the Word in our hearts. History attests to the tragedies that occur when God's Word is neglected. Remember that the unspeakable mischief and misery in Salem in the 1690s was the acceptance of "spectral evidence" (that is, that Satan could take the form and shape of innocent persons) which did not have a shred of biblical evidence. Many innocent people died. We must search God's Word. There are eight spiritual revivals in the Old Testament. Everyone of them was centered on the Word of God. True revivals are based on the reception of God's Word. It is the foundation for any true and lasting revival.

H — Hold on to God in prayer for wisdom and discernment. Herbert Lockyer reminds us:

"Craftily and cleverly, Satan hides his snares, and we have to constantly pray that we may always be aware of his tricks."³⁰

Jesus said: "Men ought to pray and not faint" (Luke 18:1). Ephesians 6 makes clear that prayer is a vital part of our "armor" and protection.

A — Accept no claims of man at face value no matter how compelling or slickly presented. Remember Jeremiah 12:6:

"For even your brothers, the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; Yes they have called abundantly after you. Do not believe them, even though they speak smooth words to you."

This is not being paranoid, only discerning and cautious. Obviously if the teacher has a long proven track record, we can be more accepting. Proverbs 15:14 is a timely word: "The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps." Remember that the person passing on the information may be deceived.

R — Require documentation (two or three witnesses) and proofs for stories and illustrations that are claimed to be true. Accept no less. Do not assume something has happened because someone says so or it is in a book or video. Even sincere believers may be misinformed and be passing on misinformation. Think how long the Crying Wind, John Todd, Betty Malz, Mike Warnke and Y2K lies were circulated and accepted. Christian bookstores and Christian ministries helped circulate these. Demand evidence, remembering that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.

P — Pursue only reputable ministries, teachers and commentaries. Insist on doctrinal statements and detailed financial reports. Take seriously documented reports of false teaching, mismanagement of money, outlandish claims and poor doctrine. Even the secular press can only report what is there. It is unfortunate that they have become the watchdog of the scammers. The Church should be doing the job.

Stay SHARP. Don't be duped by deceivers or deceit.

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5. Kathryn Lindskoog, *Fakes, Frauds & Other Malarkey*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993, pg. 266.
 6. Joni Eareckson Tada and Steven Estes, *When God Weeps*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997, pg. 19, emphasis in original.
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 8. See further, Jamie Buckingham, *Daughter of Destiny*. Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 1976.
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 16. James 5:20.
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 21. Tony Evans, *Who is This King of Glory?* Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, pg. 12.
 22. "Global News In Perspective," *Vantage Point*. Birmingham: Watchman Fellowship, April 1999, "Janet Reno Defines Cult — Another Hoax Currently Making the Rounds," pg. 6.
 23. See *The Quarterly Journal*, "The Remarkable Exploits of David Hogan," Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 1, 13-21.
 24. Michael Brown, *From Holy Laughter to Holy Fire*. Shippensburg, Pa.: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 1996, pg. 235, emphasis added.
 25. *Ibid.*, pg. 241.
 26. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
 27. John Allman, "Kilpatrick's claims cast doubt, leave questions unanswered," *Pensacola News Journal*, April 5, 1998, pg. 2.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. See *Charisma* magazine, May 2000, pp. 24-25. Also the news update article in this issue of the *Journal*, pp. 22-23.
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EDITORIALS

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plague the woman. With further investigation, the physician found that the woman had, in fact, not returned to a source of healthy water but was still drinking from the contaminated well. Moreover, he learned that she had not taken any of the medicine that he had prescribed.

The meaning of this parable?

The contaminated well water is the unhealthy doctrine and practice of false teachers, false prophets and the churches they spawn. The medicine is the antidote of a healthy church with scripturally solid doctrine and practice. The woman's afflictions are one's spiritual condition. To progress on the road of biblical sanctification (and get our spiritual feet on firm ground), we must not only stop drinking from the poisoned well, but we must get on proper medication (i.e., get into that good church home and digest sound doctrine).

For many members trying to exit cultic and aberrational groups, it is extremely difficult to accept such counsel and follow it through.

As my colleague G. Richard Fisher points out in his article on deception (found in this *Journal*), many have "invested blood, sweat, tears and money into religious deception" and for this cause "may be too embarrassed or too stubborn to admit he has been taken."

Further factors stifle the healing process as well. The sense of loss (including perhaps family, friends and finances) can be overwhelming. Likewise, the sense of fear. "What if my friends are right and the doctor is

wrong," they may reason. "Perhaps he's misdiagnosed my case. What if the group I am trying to leave is true after all — and it's just me? What if they are true prophets and I am blaspheming the Holy Spirit by my doubt and action?" can all plague the victim. The jaded mindset and the years of not really thinking can add even more fear and confusion. The spiritual terrorism techniques of these groups are overpowering and devastating and leave lasting scars.

At PFO's recent Conference on Biblical Discernment, Pastor Fisher addressed the struggles and grief of ex-cult members. In his workshop, *Getting Out – Getting On*, (designed to help the exiting member) he mapped the intricacies of the grieving process and offered practical help for one coming out of an abusive group:

"There can be the smothering feeling of loneliness. And do you know what? Sometimes the person toys with wanting to go back. Do you know why they want to go back? Because they want to feel better. Not because it makes any sense to you and me, but because they want to feel better. They are just tired of feeling bad. So they decide, 'Maybe if I go back — maybe I'll just go back for a while. Maybe I'll just reconnect a little bit because it will make me feel better.' But you see now they're beginning to take their feelings and put their feelings above God's Word. They're making feeling better, more important than obedience to God. ... We will do anything for self-comfort, especially when we're used to doing things for self-comfort; even, sometimes, things that don't make a lot of sense. Someone has said that there are some people who will stay in hell because they know the names of the streets. No matter if the terrain's dangerous, the terrain's sinful,