

# The Anatomy of Deception

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## The Anatomy of Deception: Introduction

I once had the opportunity, by the Lord's providence, to be invited to speak at a "Jesus Rally" in Winnipeg, Canada. An earlier experience some years before at the first of the Jesus Rallies was enough for me. I vowed then to never again be a part of the outdoor, carnival-like atmosphere of men and women in shorts stuffing potato chips in their mouths, while hearing what ostensibly purported to be serious words of God from the platform. The whole atmosphere chilled my soul. But when this invitation came from Winnipeg, I felt that it was God, despite my determination, and I went.

I was not supposed to be a speaker at the general sessions, but as is the format, the morning sessions were given over to the denominational and non-denominational charismatic groups. I was invited to be the speaker at the Baptist charismatic group. How could I refuse so novel an invitation as that? And indeed, those speakings were blessed. On the night of the general meeting, I found myself sitting on the platform, where an internationally known speaker was the message bearer for that session. While everyone entered into the general merriment, I sat there like a glum lump. I was agonizing and mortified at some of the statements that were coming forth. The whole prevailing atmosphere in which the audience was receiving those words reinforced my impression that the whole thing was 'hokey.' I know of no other word for it. There was a sense of artificiality, of things synthetic and feigned, having the appearance of things real, but being somehow false, although real words and meaningful terms were employed such as phrases out of Scripture that spoke of the unity of the Body.

There were prophecies being uttered that night from a certain assemblage of men who ostensibly had the gift of prophecy. They would write their prophecies out on yellow legal pads and give them to an overseer who would then call the men to the microphone at the appropriate moment to speak them. The terrible sense of unreality was all the more pronounced because the whole thing was couched in things that were very real. By the end of the night, my spirit was such that I could not wait to leave the platform.

Unfortunately, I had been assigned to bring the benediction at the end of the night. I could not, however, lend myself to the things that had been taking place, which would then identify me with it. So I went over to tug the sleeve of the man who was presiding over the platform and ask to be excused from the obligation of bringing the prayer of benediction. But before I could get to him, he announced my name; so I came to the podium in that terrible agony and frustration. All I could do was ask the people to stand up, take off their sunbonnets and visors, come to a posture of respect before God and to sing with me the Lord's prayer. And that was how the night ended. As I was leaving the platform, a layman who was in charge of arranging the sessions asked if I would be available for the general session the following morning. At first I abruptly said, "No!" But then I said to him, "Okay, but only if the Lord gives me something specific."

The next morning we drove to an open park where the rally was being conducted and where I was to be the morning speaker in the Baptist section. I discussed with my colleagues whether I ought not indeed take advantage of the invitation that had been given me and speak a word distinct and different from the kinds of things that had been promulgated. We prayed together because I did not want to fall into that role of always having to bring an ungainly word. Without making any haste to get there, and in fact, hoping that we would be too late, we parked the car and walked to the platform where the public meeting was taking place at the very moment when it was time for the speaker to be announced. They had already assigned another speaker

in my absence, but when the man saw me coming up the steps to the platform, he immediately called to me and I was rushed to the microphone.

I started with something like, "Is there something grievously wrong with me that prevents me from entering into the spirit of general merriment that has prevailed in these meetings?" I went on to read in the Scriptures where Moses was coming down Mount Sinai with the tablets of the law only to hear a noise, which was not the noise of battle or the noise of victory, but the noise of singing. I went on to say that I had the impression it was this kind of noise that characterized the previous night, and it had much to do with that earlier event of men and women, too impatient to wait for Moses to come down from the Mount with the true thing. Instead, they simulated something like it—a golden calf, a substitute—and danced and pranced around it.

Can you imagine how these words were going forth? Even as I had been walking up to the platform, I heard one of the so-called prophecies in which the speaker was saying, "I, the Lord, have been with you this weekend; I have given you my Spirit and I am going to do this and I am going to do that. . ." But for me it was leaden and without life, and so I said, "It seems that my condition is so bad that I have no witness to the authenticity of these prophecies, and I wonder indeed whether it is not some kind of idiosyncratic thing, where I am some kind of character who always seems to find a negative thing. But if my condition is somehow an expression of the heartbeat of God, we might well ask whether functions such as this are not some kind of massive deception into which we have been inducted unwarily. Just because the sermons have been rich and suggestive, and we have been impressed with the three or four thousand people who have gathered here, and our hearts have panted after true unity in the Body of Christ, we need to consider whether we have been too quick and willing to call this "unity" when, in fact, it is not. As we explore that, maybe we need also to ask about the validity of the whole charismatic phenomenon, whether we in fact have an authentic baptism in the Holy Spirit, and indeed whether we have been born again of the Spirit. Or have we been, from beginning to end, inducted into one of the most colossal deceptions that has ever been perpetrated in the religious world and all history?"

Those were the kinds of questions that I raised, and then invited as many as would, to come to the session where I was to speak on the spirit of truth. There was a cry from my heart for something authentic to take place, that we should not settle for and be satisfied with a plastic counterfeit kind of charismatica, when the cry of God is for authenticity in the earth. Plastic is not a comely substance anyway, but a plastic Kingdom is a tragedy of such proportions that I could break down and weep. For the Kingdom of God to be plastic, subject to pressures and influences to accommodate and suit the needs of men, is inconceivable. We need to be alerted to the kinds of end-time deceptions that will come in the spirit of antichrist ("instead of" or "appearing as Christ"). This booklet is intended to examine the spirit or anatomy of deception, of the things that are plastic, false, artificial, synthetic, imitative, counterfeit, spurious, feigned and pretended.

## Chapter 1 - The Cry for Reality

There is a 'Kingdom of reality' that needs to be demonstrated by God's people. And if we need to be anything as the Church, it is foremost to be eminently real, eminently loving, eminently living in the truth, speaking the truth, walking in the truth, doing the truth, being true. It is much more than merely "being correct," or scripturally and doctrinally sound. It is something that should be suffused right into the marrow and the knit of our makeup. It needs to be in our eyes, in our speech, in the inflection of our voice, our posture and our talk.

God has triggered something in my heart to raise the questions of authenticity before the Body of Christ. Are we willing for authenticity's sake and for truth's sake not to grasp at the first straw that floats our way, and which seems to present the possibility of solving *our* problems? Are we willing to refrain from simulating something out of our own humanity that has the appearance of love, but is not? I want that which comes down from above, however long I have got to bear the terrible agony and reputation of 'lovelessness.' I do not want a saccharine counterfeit. Authentic things do not come cheap. They never have. It is we, as believers, who have been inducted into the spirit of glib, unctuous and facile kinds of doings.

We are quick to reconcile that which is not reconciled in God, and thereby suffer the surfacing again and

again of problems, issues, and habits that will neither dissolve nor go away. We want a pseudo-resurrection without the ignominy and pain of the Cross. But it is only out of the ultimate agony and devastation of the Cross that ultimate glory comes. Are we lovers of the Cross? Do we love the splinters and the blood and the gore? Do we recognize that there is a cross for us to bear, and it is to this suffering that we are called, and that the resolution of the issue will not be far from us if we seek the things that are authentic and true? Do we have the discernment to distinguish the authentic from the counterfeit? Are we so habituated to success, and so desirous of seeing some visible effect of power that we are not too discriminating so long as we 'get it,' somehow? We want the excitement; we want the titillation; we want the appearance of power; we want to succeed, because the possibility of failure is a form of death we are not willing to bear, thus avoiding the Cross. We ought rather to ask ourselves what is success as God defines it?

Nazi Germany put great emphasis on demonstrations of a very impressive kind, such as their meetings at Nuremberg with marches and torchlight ceremonies, almost like pagan practices, that filled the void in German life with emotion and intensity. It was an answer to a need for fulfillment, excitement and engagement. If we do not have a valid apostolic reality in our spiritual life, that void will be filled by other contenders who are only awaiting their opportunity. If we move into the realm of what is false, synthetic, humanly contrived and not the operation of the Spirit, we can move very easily from the charismatic to the demonic. We cannot tell the difference between the hunger for God and the hunger for experience. If we have a real hunger for God, we do not have to go to places where 'signs and wonders' abound. Last Days' deceptions are related to an inadequate view of God by which we interpret the 'blessing' or seeming power as being the evidence of God as we know Him, but the true knowledge of God would have made no room for that kind of understanding, or even the desire for these phenomena in the form in which they have been manifested.

The pattern of Acts, chapter 13, shows a very different context: the demonstration of power as the provision of God to demonstrate the authority of His messengers when they were opposed by powers of darkness in the fulfillment of their mission, as opposed to the 'power' demonstrated in auditoriums to Christians who are looking for excitement, or help for their own bodies. This apostolic model is the one that we more rightly ought to look for and expect, indeed, will be the only one effective in the Last Days' final confrontation with those same powers.

### **Right Perception of God**

The apprehension of God is very much affected by how we perceive Him, and therein lies the problem. We bring a distortion out of our own subjectivity and out of our own twist. We see God through a prism of our own being. There are some people who see God as some kind of a lackey or errand boy, who provides the convenience of meetings for this kind of entertainment and so-called 'blessing.'

With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure. . . (Psalms 18:26).

To perceive God rightly requires something from us. If we have any kind of controversy with God, the problem is not God, but ourselves; we are projecting something onto Him and becoming guilty of Israel's sin. The thing that we need is to be transformed into His image, not to project our image onto Him. He is not a convenience for us. He is God. He is the Creator. He is the Almighty. I think those words have lost their cogency. Maybe we have said them too often. They have become a catechism or an invocation of a mechanical kind. Unless we know Him in the place that is too deep for words, then we do not really know Him. Until there is a gasp and a splutter, until we find ourselves prostrate and stretched out as dead, do we really know Him? How many of us will go through an entire Christian lifetime without that knowledge and still be perfectly content, and think that we know Him, and that we can communicate Him?

Manifestation phenomena are already perplexing the Church, with many asking, "Is it God?" People seem to receive benefit; they are delivered from hang-ups and depression; marriages are reconciled; people are restored to the faith. There is much evidence of 'good' things, but when the Last Days' deceptions come, of which we have been warned, will they not come with 'good' things? Can we tell the difference between the true and the false, especially when we want so much to be blessed and to have an experience and be relieved of our hang-ups and depressions? How discriminating are we about the source from which the 'blessing' comes? How do we tell whether something is *of God*, or a contrary spirit who is able to lift the depression that he may well have inflicted in the first place? Here is the key: our authentic knowledge of God, not as we thought Him to be, but as He, in fact, is.

Deception is a deception when it contains elements that are dubious and suspicious, and at the same time

there seems to be apparent blessing. Who has the acumen and the discernment to see through it except a people of priestly stature whose discernment has been increased by the exercise of it? And who can discern between good and evil, between the profane and the holy? If blessings, so called, can succeed in bringing the Church to viewing *benefit* as the criterion by which something is judged to be of God, we may well have been brought to the very ground of deception itself. There is something more important than benefits, something more important than being released from depression; it is the holiness of God, it is His name, it is His honor, it is He Himself. Receiving *benefit* of a dubious kind is too high a price to pay if it is going to throw any shadow upon His great Name. We have lost everything for the sake of benefit when the desire for benefit is, in itself, suspect.

We are not in a position to categorically condemn as deception the ostensible benefits to which many testify. God is always free to bless whom He will bless. But if the enemy can succeed in bringing the Church to viewing benefit as the determinant by which something is judged to be of God, we may well have been brought to the very ground of deception itself. So for myself, I would choose to keep my distance from such phenomena, trusting that whatever I might be missing is not greater than what I am protecting and cherishing, and that the Lord is not offended by a carefulness that would rather err in a jealousy for His holiness than to risk subverting what has already been given as pure and true.

It is remarkable that, though we are explicitly warned about end-time lying signs and wonders (2 Thess. 2:9; Matthew 24:24), we somehow imagine that it is future, and mindlessly trust ourselves in our greed for experiences, empowerments, or releases, to dubious personalities who have caught the public fancy in incredible overnight popularity. I profoundly respect God's use of the weak and the foolish thing, but I cannot, for that reason, endorse what is garish, cheap and coarse as being that weak and foolish thing of which Paul speaks. "Holiness unto the Lord" is still the standard of God's House, even when it is unspectacular and unassuming in the eyes of the world, and even in our own eyes.

Waiting is a priestly function, and we need to wait to see if our spirits are hospitable to what is being mediated from church platforms. Is it compatible with our already existing knowledge of God? If it is not compatible, they can stand on their heads, run all over the platform, and every other kind of madness. We are not to mindlessly give ourselves to it at all. Our integrity in God needs to be guarded, and we should not allow ourselves to be influenced, taken up and affected by the current trends, or else we will never have anything significant to give

The teaching of the Scripture is to seek out, through the word and prayer, the root of the problems that come up in life. One will usually find that unacknowledged disobediences are at the root of them, and the correction is accomplished primarily through that part of the Body to whom one is accountable and authentically joined.

But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love (Eph. 4:15 -16).

Revelation 12:11 tells us that "They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even unto death." What has come to us in our relationship with God, our personal history of the knowledge of God, has come through obedience and the reproaches that accompany obedience, and the sufferings that come with following the Lord. It did not come cheap. That knowledge is precious and dear. We need to make it the index of all other knowledge, and if present phenomena are not compatible with what we already know, and have tested, as being the knowledge of God as God, then we need to hold at arm's length that which purports to be from God, even if it is a 'blessing' to others.

I have found safety in aligning new phenomena with what already is my knowledge of the holiness of God through my forty-year walk. I am jealous over that inward deposit, that residue of the knowledge of God that is beyond words; it cannot be articulated, but I know it to be there, and it is in the innermost place of my being. Everything has to be tested against that. If present phenomena are not consonant with what I already know to be the holiness of God, then I am alerted, and cannot indiscriminately receive what others seem to be applauding. This has been a life-saving provision for me, and it ought to be so for *all* believers.

It was not too long ago, in a church where I was speaking, that in a moment of time the thought came to me that one does not have to be a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness, or subscribe to some cult to be deceived. One can subscribe to correct Christian orthodoxy and be as effectually deceived in the correctness of that

credal statement as if they were embracing false doctrine. And in fact, that kind of deception is the most devious and most powerful of all, because you think you are correct.

There is a desperate need in the Church to know God in truth. He is waiting to be sought, and He distinguishes that people, that generation that will ascend the holy hill of Zion, in Psalm 24, as those with 'clean hands and a pure heart,' who have not given their soul to vanity by running to Toronto and other places, as those who will ascend the holy hill and throw the bolt that opens the gate so that the King of Glory might come in. He says, "This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Thy face— even Jacob" (Psalms 24:6). You do not have to go to Toronto to seek Him; He is right where you are. Be ruthless against yourself in finding time, in sending the kids out, in getting out of the way those clamoring legitimate things that are always clawing at you. Lock yourself in a room, throw the key away. Do something, but seek God and be found of Him. His promise is that if we will seek for Me with all our heart and all our soul, we shall be found of Me.

It is a critical hour for the Church. Deception is rampant. My Jewish people are perishing. Where is that witness that moves them to jealousy? The Jews are everywhere about us, totally unimpressed and untouched with our best Charismatic demonstration. The Church needs to come into a place that is holy, holy, holy, where they know God as He is, and not just as they think Him to be. Only out of that place are we then able to make Him known.

## Chapter 2 - Holiness or Blessing

If we have any jealousy for the Church to bear the name of the Holy One of Israel, we ought to be critiquing the signs and wonders phenomena rather than mindlessly nodding in assent and indiscriminately giving ourselves over to it in the name of blessing. One can pay too high a price for blessing, and if that price is the denigration of God and His name, it is too high a price.

There is nothing more to be coveted, or more to be cherished, more to be preserved, and more to be watched over, than the sense and knowledge of God as He in fact is, and not as we may have thought Him to be. If we lose that, then what do we have? What are we? What is our witness? Everything in the world, even in the religious world, conspires against the knowledge of God. Even our own enthusiasm and desire for successful meetings might, ironically, oppose and be the greatest detriment to the knowledge of God. It is the strangest paradox implicit in the faith. Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian, made the pointed statement that nothing more reveals our pathetic humanity than our seeking to serve God, or to celebrate and worship God out of that humanity.

There is always a danger of making God commonplace, of fashioning Him in our own image, and we may not even be aware of what we are doing. We need to be reminded, or perhaps we have never known, that God is other than what we ourselves are. God's lament to us through the prophet Isaiah is that we thought God was such a one as we, and that the knowledge of Him is taught by the precept of men. It was not a compliment from God, but more of an insult: "You have fallen so low in the knowledge of Me, that the knowledge of Me is taught by the precept of men (paraphrased)." Once you have resorted to precept, it is no longer God you are declaring; it is principles you are teaching about God, and not God Himself.

We are encouraged to contend for the faith that was once and for all given to the saints. Faith is not a set of doctrines or a means by which we get something from God. True faith is the apprehension of God as He is, the fear and awe of Him and the sense of God that tempers everything. If this knowledge is not to be found in the Church, for what then shall we hope in the world? It is little wonder that the 'signs and miracles' phenomena find such ready acceptance. We are a ready-made audience looking for novelty, needing a lift or an experience. Our Christian life is hardly more than a succession of predictable Sunday services, and unhappily, that for which we are so readily grasp after is not what we really need, but in fact, will probably move us further away from obtaining the things that we really need, rather than closer.

Are these not the Last Days of which we have been warned in regard to deception, and are we not exhorted to test all spirits? Are we to ignore the prevalence of ear-splitting 'worship,' high-powered offerings, calculated theatrics, carnival bawdiness, the chilling shrieks and cries that punctuate the proceedings, the conspicuous absence of the preached word (except perhaps in a token way), the relentless, spirit-dulling testimonies

often spoken in a stupor unbecoming to the dignity of God, given even by ministers of the word of God?

Has God changed from being the God who insisted that His priests mount a ramp to the altar rather than ascend by steps lest any flesh be revealed?

And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it (Ex. 20:26).

It was a peculiar requirement, but in lifting the leg to go from one step to another, there was a slight possibility of revealing one's flesh, and the ramp was the more secure provision that no flesh would be revealed in God's presence. He is the same God who had Aaron to wear the golden head plate continually on his forehead (Ex. 28:36), the very place we now so readily make available for hands to touch us so that we can be 'slain in the Spirit.'

And you shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, "This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on anyone's body, nor shall you make any like it, in the same proportions; it is holy, and it shall be holy to you. Whoever shall mix any like it, or whoever puts any of it upon a layman, shall be cut off from his people (Ex. 30: 31-33)."

Clearly, the warning is not to counterfeit the anointing oil, or fabricate something like it. How many of us would consider the use of amplifiers to psyche people up by creating an 'atmosphere for the Spirit' as being fabricating the anointing oil? God will anoint what He appoints, not what we establish for our own satisfaction and enjoyment, or for the assurance of a good service. Let us not make any other like it. In his book, *The Latent Power of the Soul*, written in the 1920's, Watchman Nee warns about soulish power, and the deception that can be brought about through the use of musical instruments, and that was before the advent of amplifiers.

Our ache is that 'Holiness to the Lord' be inscribed afresh on the foreheads of priestly men and women who will stand for Him in this age of sleaze and vulgarity that is even now seeping into the House of God. It is the cry of Isaiah:

Depart, depart, go out from there, touch nothing unclean; go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord (Is. 52:11).

And,

Therefore having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor.7:1).

Any revival or awakening in God's people must be accompanied by an appreciation for the holiness of God. It is debatable whether the Church today has ever known the holiness I am referring to, but certainly we have a great repository in scripture in the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Numbers. I look for a Last Days' people, a remnant people of God, who have that same press upon their spirits as the plate that pressed against the forehead of Aaron, 'Holiness to the Lord;' a people who are conscious always of what they say and what they do as being before a holy Judge. Such a jealous regard for the holiness of God has been lost to us. Do we really know what the holiness of God means? This revelation is a provision from God, and if it is deeply inscribed upon our hearts, it will be a safeguard against the cheap and flimsy age in which we live.

We need to be reminded that the Holy Spirit means the Spirit of holiness, and before we think that we can obtain the advantage of the Spirit of God as being the Spirit of power or any other benefit that accrues to us through the Spirit, we need to be aware that in its first ministration, the Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of righteousness and holiness, and then, when received on that basis, He will become to us as power and the other forms that are needful in this life. How shall Jews, who are so caught up in the spirit of the world and are its principal movers, be saved out of their own massive deception if there is not a Church who can show them the holiness of their own God?

### **Worship - Priestliness**

The tragedy of the Charismatic Movement with all of its emphasis on praise is that they have made it a technique for their benefit to improve the atmosphere of their services, to provide a kind of appropriate setting for whatever will happen next; they have made it to be *for us*, rather than *for Him*. True worship is not a technique to warm our atmosphere or to put the people in the mood to hear from the speaker. Do we have enough of a fear of God that we will not allow ourselves to be cajoled by musical chords or any

kind of soulish device used to get us into 'the mood'? It is an unholy manipulation that works against the highest purpose of God. Only a priest will wince over these things, and those who want only to be religiously entertained will not so much as blink an eye.

At the heart of priestliness is waiting upon Him for the time that pleases Him. If we want to be the revelation of His radiance, then we are going to have to reconsider what we are doing when we launch off into worship and choruses or any other kind of simulation of 'waiting upon God.' Unless there is a sense of priestliness, worship will become a mere mechanic, a technique, a device and a manipulation. It is not an entering into the holy place at all. If we degenerate into becoming some kind of charismatic fellowship that celebrates praise, believing that we have some kind of revelation, but have made of it only technique and manipulation, then our end will be disastrous. I cannot think of anything more tragic than that worship should become mere rhetoric and words, a vocabulary that is appropriate to us, but a vocabulary that has no real life or meaning.

The two sons of Aaron died for bringing in strange fire. They were priests, descendants of Aaron and called of God, but they acted out of some desire to manipulate or evoke the glory of God that was not their right. They saw something that was evoked by the obedience of Aaron and Moses, and they thought somehow they could do the same. But they came at the wrong time, in the wrong way, and instead of evoking a fire that was a glory, they evoked a fire that slew them. Strange fire! It had the form, but was not the actual thing, and instead of bringing life, it brought death.

We must not think that this is some archaic episode out of the past that has no profound relevance for us. Even Aaron could not enter the holiest place at his own choosing. This is a word for us. Having just witnessed the instant death of his sons, who does he presume to think he is, that he can enter into the holiest place of all at his own whim and at his own convenience and at his own choosing? What is the practical application for us? Do we think that we can enter at our whim and will into the place of holy worship (worship which is a sweet smelling savor unto God) just because we have gotten the band going and the instruments playing and the choruses ringing? This is not the true incense or the hot coals from which a cloud will issue forth in which the Lord will appear. It will be a thud, and not a glory. If we continue in that way, we will get phony prophecies, phony exhortations, things calculated to work up a certain kind of response. We will go from being unspiritual, to being soulish, to being psychic, until in the end, it becomes outright deception.

### **Eunuchs for Christ**

Jesus spoke at one time about eunuchs. A eunuch is a man who has had the axe 'laid to the root.' Jesus said that there are some eunuchs who are born eunuchs, who are biological freaks, who will never have the physical enabling for the gratification that is given to all men; there are some eunuchs that are made eunuchs by men, and there are some eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. Only a eunuch can be implicitly trusted because there is no way that he is going to usurp anything from the Kingdom over which he has charge. He is not going to appropriate anything for himself, because the axe has been laid to the root. Like the Lord before Him, a eunuch has been "cut off out of the land of the living (Isaiah 53:8b)," and God offers us the same opportunity. It is the Cross of Christ Jesus, laid to the root of life, that we might be cut off out of the land of the living.

A eunuch for Christ's sake, or a dead man, is the only person who will be safe at the end of the age, an age abounding with iniquity, full of filth and lust, powerful seductions, subtlety and sensuality. The axe has been laid to the root of his life; he has recognized the horrible propensities of his flesh, and has seen that self-conscious discipleship is not the answer. He has seen that singing the choruses is not the answer. There is only one answer; it is the Cross of Christ Jesus, not the plastic counterfeit, but the blood of the Cross, the place of suffering and shame where God bids us to come.

The Cross is the power of God for salvation for those who will join Him in that place, who have voluntarily made themselves eunuchs for Christ's sake, who have welcomed the axe laid to the root. We need to see this truth, and come to it and cleave to it until the end of the age. Having made that decision, we invite the daily death. It is a daily reiteration of this mystery in ways that are uniquely appropriate to our life, our call and our walk.

The life of Christ will never manifest itself in our lives other than out of that one necessary condition, namely, death. The whole re-enactment, the whole drama, and the whole principle is future and eschatological, but also for the present. The whole genius of it is before us daily, and in fact, if that Cross is not operative daily,

if we are not willing to suffer its deaths, for example, when our flesh rises up, if we find a way to skirt around it, then we make ourselves, to that degree, candidates for deception. The issue of being saved from deception is the issue of the Cross and our willingness to be ruthless with ourselves, and to bear the suffering of it when God makes the issue clear. If we run from something, if we are escapist, if we rationalize and justify our conduct and find a way to explain it that gratifies us and saves us from the awareness of sin as sin, then we are to that degree, candidates for deception. That is why the love of the truth is cited in scripture as being one of the main means by which we are saved from deception, not a love for something technically correct, but rather truth as God understands it.

The most acute expression of that truth is Christ and Him crucified. The church or individual who moves away from the Cross, and has allowed the Cross to be a mere ceremonial object or an architectural decoration, but is not living a cruciform life and is not willing for the suffering of the Cross, but instead wants the blessing, makes himself a candidate for deception. That deception will likely come from very God Himself, who will give lying delusions to those who have rejected the love of the truth. Mere tolerance for the truth, or even respect for the truth, is not enough. Only a love for the truth keeps us from deception because truth is painful, especially the truth about ourselves, but we have got to be ruthless in this regard and apply the Cross, and bring to the death that thing that God brings to us and allows us to see.

## Chapter 3 - True Church

As we come to the end of the age, we must be particularly wary of the phenomena of 'lying' signs, wonders and miracles. If there is a void in our lives, if our present church life is dull, and we are not receiving in our relationship with the saints the kinds of things that should constitute the true and apostolic life of believers that makes for our maturity, engaging our spirits and minds and the totality of our being, we will have an itch to fill that void with running to the venues where such impressive demonstrations of power are being displayed; we will be drawn to individuals who seem to have it, and to ministries that demonstrate it. We will be open receptors for this because of the condition of our inadequate conventional Christian life. One of the preventives, therefore, is the work of God in our churches, so that we do not have to find compensation outside of them.

To maintain and guard our spirits, to grow in the nurture and admonition of the Lord cannot be performed in an environment of a Sunday service and a mid-week Bible study. True church is not a Sunday supplement. We are coming to the end of the age! God has great purposes to consummate through the Church, but only that remnant of the Church that knows Him and will do great exploits out of that knowledge, and that knowledge only. Paul understood this when he said, "that I might know Him and the fellowship of His sufferings!" There is a knowledge of God in *His* sufferings that is so exquisite, and it is not to be obtained from any other source. What is our present attitude to the sufferings of Christ? Have we been inducted into the mind-set of the world with its pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, protecting our life, our privacy, and guarding ourselves lest there be any injury or pain? No wonder that much of the Church is hardly more than a conglomerate of individualities living their privatistic lifestyles. Where is the Church of the apostolic kind where those who believed were together?

And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all (Acts 4:33).

We are going to have to break down the brick walls we have built, and the sanctity of our separate and privatistic lives, contrary to the ethos, character and genius of true church. True church is a suffering before it is a glory, just by what we are in ourselves, together, in the intensity of that life, and until we will go that way, we will not move anybody to jealousy, certainly not Jews.

When we see a phenomenon touted as revival, in which the word of God is conspicuously absent, or denigrated as not being the source of God's greatest blessing, our alarm bells should start ringing. When those who are at the forefront of any revival phenomenon begin to deprecate their own preaching, saying that what they are now seeing far eclipses any result that they saw from their preaching, then we have already embraced a deception. If the avenues by which the 'blessing' comes are not the word of God, or our response to God's word, which has always been the operative principle of God, but rather, it comes through the hearing of the testimony of others, or seeing men decompose before one's eyes in drunken stupor, sagging and collapsing on the platform, accompanied by shrieks of delight and the inducement to join in,

then we have already crossed an invisible line of truth. It may be an avenue of receiving alleviation from dullness and boredom from church programs, but we have already succumbed to deception.

Even if what we have been observing in recent years is not the lying signs and wonders about which we have been warned as characteristic of the Last Days, when those lying signs and wonders do come, how will they be substantially different in form and appearance from the signs and wonders we presently see? And how will we exercise *then* the discernment that we are incapable of exercising now? When the lying signs and wonders come, will we recognize them? There *will* be signs, wonders, miracles, demonstrations of power and much 'benefit'! But they will be *lying* signs and wonders, and if we are concerned only with the benefit of them, and not all that much with their source, will we be able to discern the one from the other?

There is a gift of discernment, but there is also an exercise of discernment that is corporate, that is somehow the reflection of the stature, quality and maturity of the corporate people of God. Are we able to discern not only the things that are evil, but the things that are 'good'? The things that are good are most likely to trap us. It is 'good' to go here; it is 'good' to do this, and it is 'good' to take care of that need. But it is 'good' that will be our undoing because evil is so much more blatant and evident. The 'good' thing is the most difficult to discern unless our discernment has been strengthened by the exercise thereof. Is 'good' good enough? Unless we have a priestly jealousy for that which is perfect, 'good' will be our downfall. There *will* be demonstrable miracles, an evidence of power with a result, but does that power mean the result is from God? Or is it a work of the flesh, or of the enemy? If men need only to employ the 'name of Jesus' to perform many wonders in His name, what do we know about the source of these wonders? It may even be that those men are sincere, that they mean well, and that they think they are doing service to God. One safeguard to keep us from an emptiness and shallowness that makes us responsive to the appearance of power is to be so solidly in relationship with Christ and with God's people in an earnest and authentic way that the void is filled. That saves us from being easily convinced by lying signs and wonders.

Are we in a fellowship that is a fellowship indeed, rather than a mere aggregate of individuals meeting casually on Sunday for an hour or two? Are the people leaving in the same condition in which they came? I am talking about the real thing to which God has called us, moving from glory to glory and beholding in each other's faces the glory of God, going again from house to house breaking bread, and at the same time hearing and sharing the kinds of things that in fact make up our life, and experiencing the redemptive work of God working through each other. If our Christian life is a boredom and a drag, and we are looking for excitement and demonstrations of seeming power, we need, really, to look at what the structure and the whole make-up of our Christian life is.

We are urged to exhort one another daily while it is yet today, because next Sunday is too late. How many of us are in a relationship with saints of God daily? How many of us are willing to give up the privacy that we so enjoy, and the time before the television set to make room for that kind of relationship? I am not talking about merely dropping in, putting your feet up on the coffee table and making small talk; that is not a synonym for fellowship. Do we love the other brother enough to say, "My spirit is disturbed. I heard your singing at the service and I heard your testimony, but there is something about it that does not ring true. It lacked the real joy of the Lord. I sense that you are drifting into a kind of performer mentality and spirit. If I am wrong, forgive me, but love compels me to express the sense of alarm and caution in my heart."

Is there something in our lives, something wrong, that is beginning already to show itself, especially in the place where we think ourselves spiritual? And do we prefer privacy to daily exhortation? Do we prefer coming together for a Sunday wing-ding and feeling good, then going back again into the same pattern of privacy and seclusion? If so, we are guaranteed that the world will have its opportunity to invade, compromise and ultimately destroy us? The church in which the people are not in authentic relationship with one another daily is not church. True church relationship is costly, both in terms of pride and humiliation, as well as in terms of privacy and time. Are we willing to make time for it? Is it of that great a value to us, that the name of God not be blasphemed in the earth, for we are His witness people?

The full sanctification we so desperately need in order to live an authentically Christian life comes not by a wand magically passed over us, but in the interaction of the saints. It comes with the grit, the strains and the tensions that are only to be found in true church, where the saints are going on with determination from glory to glory. Sanctification belongs to those who love the truth, and who recognize that there is only one agency by which that truth can be formalized and demonstrated in the earth, namely, a Church that is called to be the ground and the pillar of truth. But if the Church becomes a flaky phenomenon, if it is soft, indulgent and corrupt, if it loves its flesh and its luxury, if it is willing to cut corners, then what hope shall we have for its effectiveness in the world?

## Self-Centered Church

When sitting in meetings, I have often been astonished when the appeals for healing come. Almost everyone comes out of their seats. I have never seen such a sick Church everywhere, and I think that we will continue to be sick, both physically and spiritually, so long as we live egocentric lives. For example, what is the first question you raise when you leave the building Sunday morning? Is it, "What did you think of the speaker? Did you like him? Did you like the worship? Did you like the sermon?" Is your 'like' the center of your being? If we have shifted from carnal centrality to spiritual centrality, we are still the center. No wonder we are sick; no wonder we need continually to be healed. Until we make God, His glory, His honor, His name and His eternal purposes the center, we will *continue* to be sick. We have a false center, and it is in ourselves.

To think in terms of *our own* benefit and to have *our* central focus on what we receive is, in itself, the breeding ground of deception. The saving grace from God is to have another center outside of ourselves and other than ourselves, namely, the eternal purposes of God, which redound to His glory. Our sickness is a preoccupation with ourselves, even our spiritual selves, which makes us candidates for deception, and the only corrective is to replace our self-centeredness with that which God intends, a jealousy for His glory. Our mistake is to think that our concern with spiritual things is not as much a form of egocentrism as a concern with carnal things. Let the spiritual benefits come, not because they are our principal focus, but let them come out of a life of obedience and discipline that seeks first and foremost the things that pertain to God. Out of that may come the benefits that accrue, but we are not to be seeking them as the things in themselves. That would still make our focus egocentric, and therefore, by very definition, the posture of deception itself.

To seek God is painful to the flesh. We are lazy and indolent; we cannot find the time; there are too many distractions, even of a valid kind. Another safety for the Church is the seeking of God in the 'closet' and in the holy place. The first results of that seeking will be dullness, deadness and nothing; our prayers will not go up beyond the ceiling. It is a testing, and we need to persevere beyond that point until finally we come into a place of grace where God Himself is giving us divine assistance, and we are not looking for an experience, and we are not looking for the benefit of receiving the fire of God, or revelation for preaching. No, we are seeking Him because He is God, and He is the thing in Himself, and not for any benefit that accrues to us. Any seeking of God that seeks benefit is by that definition no longer a seeking of God. Seeking God must be without any concern or consideration for ourselves. We seek Him because He is God, and God deserves our prostration before Him; He alone is God. Only in that place can we begin to sense the awe of God, the fear of God and the holiness of God. These are some of the criteria that will save us from the things that are false.

"The bar is open. Come on in now and drink! Have your fill! There is no limit!!!" The vulgarity of that invitation (which I have witnessed) is flagrantly contrary to the holiness of God and so patently a contradiction of God. How can we even respond to invitations of that kind unless we are mindless and so bent on 'experience'? When we see people 'slain in the spirit' or in a stupor of drunkenness, we mindlessly want it too, though, if we had even the most rudimentary sense of God, we would be turning and running in the opposite direction. When the Lord reveals what all of this is about, those of us who have opened ourselves up for this kind of thing will be astonished that we had been so easily deluded. Out of the depth of the repentance and the acknowledgment of our sin there will come a seeking of God and a true knowledge of God that will enable us to endure in the Last Days' stresses and trials. Who is a greater candidate for deception than those who think that they cannot be deceived?

The enemy's whole purpose in deception is either to destroy or to divert. Deception that springs from wanting to 'do' for God and to be used by God is the most subtle, the most powerful and the most difficult to recognize. Are we in a fellowship predicated on a man's vision for a work? Is it a situation where he can be corrected, or is he surrounded by affirming people whom he calls 'intercessors'? And how much are they working toward the success of that ministry for the benefit that might accrue to them? In other words, the whole basis by which those people are related to one another and to him is a soulish vision, rather than the vision of the Lord and His over-arching and eternal purposes. Can you predicate a fellowship and a ministry of intercession on the basis of this one thing? Where is the safeguard?

Why is the fellowship dull and the services predictable? What is lacking in our normative Christianity that makes us susceptible to this kind of alternative? My own answer would be that we have forsaken, or never known at all, the apostolic and prophetic configuration of the faith centering in the Cross. We do not know

the sacrifice, the suffering, the embracing of the eternal purposes of God, not the least of which is the mystery of Israel in the Last Days that requires a Church of an ultimate kind. For the lack of that kind of format and orientation enlivening the entire faith and the issues of the faith, we condemn ourselves to finding an alternative to the blandness in our lives, the end thereof being spiritual death.

## Chapter 4 - Hosea: A Word to the Church

The book of Hosea contains the heart cry of God for the apostasy and backslidden condition of His people Israel. My sense is that the Church at large today stands in very close proximity to the condition of Israel when it fell from relationship with their God. One of the marks of that apostasy, both in Israel and the Church, is a spirit and discernment so dulled that we are not even in a position to appreciate our own condition.

Ironically, in our fallen condition, we purport to celebrate God, and think that we are in a commendable relationship with Him. It is a condition that compels God to send prophets to convey things as He Himself sees them, which is often, if not invariably, different from the way that we see them. Truth is everything as God sees it, and it is often painful to make the adjustment from our seeing to His, but I can tell you, as a descendant of a people who failed to make that adjustment, the consequences for us have been exceedingly tragic.

The heart of God is grieved while ours is not. We may be saddened, we may be disappointed, we may be perplexed, but we are not grieved. It is a deep grief that needs to come into us, a grief of the kind that God Himself feels as He looks upon the pathetic state of the Church. The fall of many of its prominent leading celebrities is only the symptom and the statement of a much deeper and extensive ill. In my opinion, our great sickness is due to the lack of the authentic knowledge of God, and if we lack that, then how authentic are we? The scriptures are given for our admonition upon whom the ends of the age have come. God's intention was that we, as the Church, should be instructed by Israel's experience, by His dealings with them, especially in the severity of His judgments, which are much harsher for those who are called and appointed to be sons of the Most High.

The Church is at a place very close to experiencing the judgment of God, and if we are clucking our tongues over the fallen state of some of the evangelical and charismatic stars, and think somehow that their condition is unrelated to us, we need to look more closely at ourselves. These fallen stars are the visible symptom, sign and statement of the whole Church of which we, and they, are a part, and whose manner of life and lifestyle we have made possible, and have condoned and would secretly enjoy having for ourselves.

The world is absolutely vile and abysmal beyond every description. It is steeped in blood and violence. All of society has had a part in this; it is complicit; it is involved in the evil itself by the very nature of the thing. God commanded His priests to teach the people the difference between the holy and the profane, but if God's priestly people do not know the difference between the two, then what shall we expect of the world? We need to be reminded that God's judgments begin in His house before they will begin in the world. In many respects, the world is the statement of the Church's failure. There has not been an objective standard of truth made visible by God's people that the world can see; it therefore takes its liberty, for it has nothing with which to align itself and there is very little calling it to accountability.

Listen to the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, for the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land, because there is no faithfulness [truth] or kindness [mercy] or knowledge of God in the land.

There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing, and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Therefore the land mourns, and everyone who lives in it languishes along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky; and also the fish of the sea disappear.

Yet let no one find fault, and let none offer reproof; for your people are like those who contend with the priest.

So you will stumble by day, and the prophet also will stumble with you by night; and I will destroy

your mother.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children (Hosea 4:1 - 6).

How is this appropriate to us as the Church? One of the severest pronouncements against Israel, at one of the lowest points of her backslidden history, was that the knowledge of God had been rejected. Nothing will keep us or save us other than the true knowledge of God. God is holy, awesome, fearful and righteous! If there is no knowledge of God, then there is no knowledge of truth or mercy. God is truth and mercy. If we miss Him, then we have missed everything, and we can miss Him even in the very moment we are ostensibly celebrating Him. We can be guilty of the lack of a true knowledge of God while we are invoking His name and singing His praises. We can enjoy everything that we are doing, experiencing the euphoric lift, while that very thing betrays and conceals from us what, in fact, our real condition is.

Their deeds will not allow them to return to their God. For a spirit of harlotry is within them, and they do not know the Lord (Hosea 5:4).

This is a statement about Israel, the same Israel who was given the commandments and the revelation from Sinai, the statutes, the ordinances, the prophets and the great King. God's indictment is that they have not known the Lord, but instead have followed after harlotry, and the two things, harlotry and not knowing the Lord, are in relationship. The spirit of harlotry can express itself in various ways to the degree that a person does not know the Lord; the one is the counterbalance and the antidote to the other. The knowledge of the Lord is the only thing that will keep us from the spirit of harlotry, which we will act out in exact proportion as we have ability and financial wherewithal.

Our human frames are vulnerable. It is one thing to be hit from the blind side, and that is why we need each other, to protect one another from that blindness, from that unexpected temptation that comes in the moment of weakness. That is one kind of falling and one kind of sin, and there is certainly not an excuse for being a partaker of that, but how many of our leading evangelists have become powers unto themselves with extraordinary wealth, pompous lifestyles, and have surrounded themselves with staff who dare not contradict them lest they lose their well-paid jobs?

If you want to guarantee a fall for yourself, then all you need to do is to live sensually, and that does not mean looking at erotic pictures. It could mean living in a house with 8,000 square feet of living space, believing that you have got it coming to you. We need to grieve over the celebration of charismatic personalities and performers whose lifestyles we have all condoned, if not helped pay for. If we allow our leaders a lifestyle that finally erupts into sin so visible that they are brought down, then what shall we say about ourselves? Is our condition better than theirs? What do we do with the measure of wherewithal that we have? What kind of sensuality and gratification are we allowing ourselves, thinking somehow that it is legitimate because we are serving God?

What is there in our hearts that has never yet been revealed because we have never chosen to let the Lord arbitrate and determine our lifestyle and bring us into that earnest and intensive relationship with saints by which we might have been found out? Holiness comes with a price.

What should determine the lifestyle of the people of God? The income which is theirs, the availability of goods and riches and the talents which they can employ, or what? Jesus had not a place to lay His head. Paul had no certain dwelling place. Apostolic poverty characterized the early Church. Peter and John spoke to the lame beggar, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have, I give to you: 'In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene-walk! (Acts 3:6).'" What they had was power, glory, great grace, and unspeakable richness in the reality and knowledge of God. What do we have?

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings (Hosea 6:6).

God actually desires for us to have the knowledge of Him, but that knowledge is not easily obtained; every force of hell and power of darkness seeks to prevent God's people from obtaining this knowledge. The whole world seems to be involved in a conspiracy against the knowledge of God. The phone will ring, the kids will cry, the dog will bark, our future plans, the job, marriage, the clothes that need to be washed, the machine that is broken, there is the roof that needs to be fixed. Things will crowd in upon our consciousness the moment that we set ourselves to seek the Lord so as to find Him. His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts, and we have made the Christian walk too casual and too cheap. We are a

generation that mistakes our concepts about God for the authentic knowledge of God, for if we knew Him, we would fear Him, and we would not so much as contemplate, let alone do, the things that have scandalized His name throughout the world.

What men and women think, when free to think what they will in the privacy of their own minds, in the reverie and the fantasy that they will allow themselves, is the statement of where they are in God. It is what we do with our ability to do it that tells what we really are, even though the act, in itself, may not be patently sinful. Perhaps it is only an indulgence like buying two king-size hamburgers, and feeling as though maybe I should, but knowing that I do not need them; it is an indulgence to the flesh that will not benefit the spiritual life of the inner man, and yet I am financially able to afford it.

Do we predicate our conduct on the basis of what we are able to do, or what the Spirit is prompting? Are we in a position to deny ourselves things that are available? Are we resisting sin unto the shedding of blood, and do we recognize that the whole world is steeped in the evil one, the father of lies; it is bathed in deception, permeated with the spirit of sensuality, and it will take, on our part, a rigorous determination before God to resist it. Are we fighting that fight? The knowledge of God has much to do with the degree to which we are surrendering and succumbing to the spirit of the world. Heaven and earth are opposed to each other in every point and particular, and he whoever is a friend of the world is an enemy of God.

But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me.

Gilead is a city of wrongdoers, tracked with bloody footprints.

And as raiders wait for a man, so a band of priests murder on the way to Shechem; surely they have committed crime (Hosea 6:7-9)

Do we see every sin as a treachery against the knowledge of God? Can you believe that the priesthood of God could ever come to the place where they themselves would become murderers, and engage in lewdness? That was Israel's experience and example before us, and who, today, thinks that he is made of better stuff than the Israelite priests of old? And by what means does a holy priest come to a place of both lewdness and murder? Does it take place in one fell swoop? Or does it come by a process, by degrees of corrosion and the subtlety of day-by-day condescension and compromise? The Bible exhorts us to keep our hearts with all diligence, and to exhort one another daily while it is yet today. Are we in relationship daily with people who exhort us? This is something that cannot be put off; tomorrow could be too late. Is our privacy and time before the television more valuable than seeing the glory of God being made manifest in all the earth?

Though the pride of Israel testifies against him, yet they have neither returned to the Lord their God, nor have they sought him for all this. So Ephraim has become like a silly dove, without sense; they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria. When they go, I will spread My net over them; I will bring them down like the birds of the sky. I will chastise them in accordance with the proclamation to their assembly. Woe to them, for they have strayed from Me! Destruction is theirs, for they have rebelled against Me! I would redeem them, but they speak lies against Me. And they do not cry to Me from their heart when they wail on their beds; for the sake of grain and new wine they assemble themselves, they turn away from Me (Hosea 7: 10-14).

We are in trouble when insincerity passes for sincerity, and we cannot tell the difference. They have made a seeming show that impresses men, but it does not impress God.

They turn, but not upward, they are like a deceitful bow; their princes will fall by the sword because of the insolence of their tongue. This will be their derision in the land of Egypt.

Put the trumpet to your lips! Like an eagle the enemy comes against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed My covenant, and rebelled against My law. They cry out to Me, "My God, we of Israel know Thee!" (Hosea 7:16 - 8:2).

They cry to Him when His judgment comes in proportion to the iniquity and sin of His house. Is it not pitiful that there is nothing like judgment to wake us up? There is nothing like calamity to break us from our slumber and to bring us to the understanding that our God is a jealous God.

How far will God go to judge His people, and to expunge sin, compromise and contradiction from their lives corporately and personally? He drove Israel out of its Land and allowed 6 million of them to go through the labor camps, the gas chambers and the ovens of Auschwitz as a continuing statement of judgment for their unwillingness to turn to Him, and He says that these people are the apple of His eye. We should fear and

recognize the goodness and severity of God! Paul warned us that if He did not hesitate to break them off, He would not hesitate to do the same to us. If we do not know God in His severity, then how can we know Him in His goodness? How can we know Him if we do not know Him as a God who will judge?

Israel has rejected the good; the enemy will pursue him (Hosea 8:3).

That is what happens when our sin casts off the covenant-keeping God and He removes His protection and covering; we are open and exposed to the reaction and the counter-response of the enemy in exact proportion to our sin. That has been the history of Israel, and we need to be instructed by it. Do we think ourselves immune, that such things will not come upon us?

They have set up kings, but not by Me; they have appointed princes, but I did not know it (Hosea 8:4a).

They never consulted with God; they never asked Him; they acted on their own initiative. We do not know what it means to consult God. There is such a spirit of presumption in us, in exact proportion to the absence of our knowledge of God, and once the knowledge of God is found, its being found does not guarantee that we will never lose it. In this world, in all that is vile, in every powerful pressure, temptation and force that wants to dishonor and defame God, and mock Him in every perverse way, you can imagine the kinds of things that are directed against us to dull us again to a place of ease and comfort in Zion. It is going to take something severe, something radical for us to maintain the knowledge of God once we have found it, and then to deepen it and grow in that knowledge. Is this foremost in our consideration? Do we feel that we presently have it?

For Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces; and Judah has multiplied fortified cities, but I will send a fire on its cities that it may consume its palatial dwellings (Hosea 8:14).

I fully expect to see a mighty coming down in the years ahead; we are going to see great cathedrals and church buildings standing absolutely empty, with whole congregations dissipating away. The world will see the mockery of churches that took million of dollars from God's people standing as empty houses. We will see the great Christian recreation resorts rusting away and standing like ghost towns as mocking testimonies to the failure of people to take God seriously, turning the faith into an entertainment upon which God shall breathe His fire and bring it down.

Do not rejoice, O Israel, with exultation like the nations! For you have played the harlot, forsaking your God. You have loved harlots' earnings on every threshing floor.

Threshing floor and wine press will not feed them, and the new wine will fail them (Hosea 9:1 - 2).

It is happening already. We have become a manipulating people of technique and methodology, and the new wine has failed.

Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, they will bear no fruit. Even though they bear children, I will slay the precious ones of their womb (Hosea 9:16).

We can bring forth, but is it His fruit? Is it eternal fruit? Or does it have only the seeming appearance of effectiveness and success? Do we even know the difference, and are we jealous for the fruit that only God can give, rather than what we are able to produce and fabricate because we are skillful and because we have the financial enablement? 'Fruit' is not the testimony of our right relationship with God, or the knowledge of Him, or even of His blessedness. His fruit is of another kind; it is fruit of the Spirit, and His Spirit is the spirit of humility and meekness, not arrogance, presumption, pride and a sumptuous lifestyle that contradicts the whole tenor of anything and all that we know about God and about His Church.

Israel is a luxuriant vine; he produces fruit for himself. The more his fruit, the more altars he made; the richer the land, the better he made the sacred pillars (Hosea 10:1).

Are we not guilty of exactly the same practices? Are we not motivated toward religious success, to building programs and every other kind of program to enrich the lives of our congregations and thus make them fruitful 'for the Kingdom'? Have we ever asked God what His design for the Church is? Have we met His conditions for true ministry to go forth? There are many self-fashioned, self-proclaiming men that bear ministry titles, but what grieves God even more is that the people out there do not even know the difference. They are so easily hoodwinked and impressed. Any glib character, anyone who has facility with the scriptures, makes a show, gives an impression, has been involved with churches, has traveled, is automatically assumed to be a man of God.

So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him (Malachi 3:18).

The ability to discern the true servants of God is given as the criterion of a people, finally at the end of the age, of whom God says, "And they will be Mine (Mal. 3:17a)." They came to the ability to discern by what took place in verse 16 of that chapter.

Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name.

Their speaking to one another was not cheap talk, or small talk, but an examination of our own lives, the condition of the Church, the word of God as we hear it proclaimed. They examined themselves to see if they were in the faith. They feared the Lord and that is why they did it. They were jealous for His name, His honor and His glory.

Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance to kindness; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you (Hosea 10:12).

It is long past the time to seek the Lord. Have we sought the Lord until He has rained righteousness upon us? Do we have a heart for this kind of sacrificial seeking, to break through the layers of film that stand between Heaven and us?

You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruit of lies. Because you have trusted in your own way, in your numerous warriors (Hosea 10:13).

You were impressed with the mighty men, with the princes, with the hotshots, their systems and their lifestyles. You mourned when they fell because you would have liked to see them continue. You thought that their ministry was appropriate and deserving. You secretly desired such a lifestyle for yourself. God has waited long and He has been silent, but if we allow these judgments that are falling now to pass unnoticed and merely cluck our tongues as if somehow we are not implicated and sharing in that same lifestyle and subscribing to the same values, then God's judgments have been in vain for us, and we will have to experience them personally, directly and more painfully. It is time to seek the Lord, to know Him. We cannot know Him in a true way and bypass the issues of judgment. We have paid a high price for the loss of the understanding of God, both in judgment and in mercy, in severity and goodness. God's dealings with Israel, past, present and future are more or less absent from our consideration. We have thus voided the most profound revelation of God given us in Scripture because the greatest provision that God gives the Church is Israel, and His dealings with that people.

If the Holocaust was not just the consequence of the aberration of some crazy man by the name of Hitler, but in fact, the intent of God and the fulfillment of scriptures in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, of a judgment that would come in the Last Days, how much more should we be fearful of the dealings of that God for ourselves? The glib, unctuous and frivolous character of our Christianity has opened the door to deceptions of the most remarkable kind, and it has altogether to do with the absence of the knowledge of God and the fear and the awe of God, that would have been ours if we had been rightly instructed by what God has done to Israel and will yet do, before He restores them in His mercy.

## Chapter 5 - Ananias, Sapphira, and Truth

The account of Ananias and Sapphira in the Book of Acts is a remarkable episode of an incident that occurred in another age, in an hour when the Spirit of God prevailed in such magnitude and purity that the very same act which might well be applauded today, resulted, in that day, in sudden judgment and death. By applauded, I mean that we do not ask questions about those who give great contributions to the Church, but instead, we give such a person a place of honor and acknowledgement, a deacon at least, if not an elder. But the Church, which identified the lie and was not impressed with the sum, is not the Church of today.

It was the Church in its glory then, because it was alert to the issue of truth and deception, because it knew that before the Spirit of God manifests as the Spirit of power, He is first and foremost the Spirit of truth. When truth is disallowed, when truth is compromised, can we think that the dove is going to be around to perform the expressions of power that serve our needs and gratify our souls, if we have forsaken Him and His first designation and identity as the Spirit of truth? There needs to be a jealous regard for the truth that Peter exercised, enabling him to discern the fraud of a man and his wife giving a sum of money, however impressive, presenting it as the whole, though it was only in part.

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God."

And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came upon all who heard of it (Acts 5:3-5).

Almost in the next breath we read,

And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico (Acts 5:12).

In other words, the respect for the Spirit of God as the Spirit of truth makes way for the Spirit of God as the Spirit of *power*. The contemporary Church has reversed it; we have celebrated the power, the signs, the wonders, and relegated the truth to a distant consideration, if indeed, any consideration at all. And which of us has not played the game of giving the part and making that to appear to be the whole?

There was a time when we used to say that the truth is the whole truth and nothing but the truth, or it is a lie. It is the whole truth, or it is not the truth. Any disqualification, any cutting of corners, anything less than what is whole and full converts what seems to be impressive into a lie. I take pains to dwell on this because it is a statement of the Church today; we have only given part, but we call that part the whole, when it is only a part. We have not the reticence, the modesty or the meekness appropriate to a Church whose Lord is the Lamb, because we are full of hype and exaggeration, pompous ambition and activity, and think that that constitutes the whole.

So we need to ask ourselves, are we doing anything different from what Ananias and Sapphira did when we seek and expect the evidence and power of a life totally given to God, while giving ourselves only in part, but presuming to have given ourselves wholly? We all want the semblance of these things, the comfort of the Spirit, the intimate communion, but we want it at the lesser price of acknowledging truth only in a doctrinal sense, or in the sense of being correct, rather than acknowledging truth as the very sum and substance of the reality of our lives. We want to speak truth, but not to be true; we want correct words, we want to acknowledge truth, but not to obey it. We are bringing our partial, phraseological truth and making that to stand for the whole, as if we have the reality that we are describing.

To decide to tolerate one deceit is to violate the whole truth. To be ninety-nine percent true, or mostly true, and represent that as the whole truth is to lie utterly, and to sin in one part is to sin in the whole. It is where we are most tempted to keep back for ourselves that the issue of truth really lays. What one truth, what one final issue, what one reserve is the thing that keeps us back from that utterness towards God, that makes truth really the truth, and brings to the Church and to its fellowship the reality of His presence and His glory?

### **Jude Foresaw This Day**

Why is it that in the Church today we are willing to be so uncritical about anything that purports to be power, especially as it comes to us through popular ministries and personalities who have become so accepted and so much a part of the norm of our modern charismatic and pentecostal Christendom? Can we not bring ourselves to consider that those men might be themselves the vehicles through which deception can come? There is a certain pattern of dangers that God wants to bring to our attention in the Book of Jude.

Yet in the same manner these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties (v. 8).

We may have thought that this warning in Jude speaks of a future time when these things shall be so blatantly conspicuous that it will be clear to whom they refer. I am already beginning to sense and to see the resonance of Jude's reference here, and the time has come to examine our present Christendom and its ministries in the light of these warnings.

Who would ever think that Jude v. 8 would be a description of any present-day ministry or minister, let alone those who have touched the public imagination and for whom we feel such affection? All that is being spoken of here are not things as we perceive them, but things as God perceives them. He sees them as filthy dreamers, and what makes their dreams filthy, I would suggest, is their ambition, and the way in which their ministry is a means to their own empowerment and to the establishing of a kind of sumptuous lifestyle which has somehow been thought to be perfectly in keeping with the importance of the kind of work that is being done by these individuals. But they are ambitious, and it is shown by the character of their ministries: the

millions of dollars that are required to finance them, and the lifestyle that is very much in keeping with the whole magnitude of the thing. The only minister that can be trusted at the end of the age is one who does not dream his own dreams, does not have personal ambition, and does not see himself as some kind of exalted personality commanding the attention, the devotion or the affection of millions.

What does 'rejecting authority' mean? Could it be that they have no real heart for authority; they do their own things, and are not responsible or accountable to anyone. They might have some credentials in a Pentecostal organization, but the way in which those organizations are structured today, there is very little accountability. They have a staff and a board who themselves are paid handsome salaries to affirm the celebrity in his own desire and will, certainly not to contradict him, and certainly not to hold him accountable, but even, at times, to bail him out of the predicaments that come through those things that defile the flesh.

But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. (Jude v.10-11).

There is a tension, and even a hatred, between those who purport to serve God and who make a sacrifice for God which is not acceptable in His sight (however much it is heralded by man), and those who do bring the sacrifice that is honored of Him, who have to bear the brunt of the animosity and the hatred of those who are running on parallel tracks but are doing their own religious thing. Balaam's error was 'ministry for sale.' The ministry, or the calling, or even the anointing that was validly given by God in its inception, for God's gifts and callings are irrevocable, was greedily appropriated somewhere in the course of time by the individual himself for his own self-gain. The Spirit spoke through Jude to give a portent of things to come in the Last Days through men who are not of the faith, though they are somehow within it. They are a perverse distortion of the authentic and yet have a powerful influence, with symptoms that we need to recognize, because their influence is working in the Church today.

These men are those who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves (Jude v.12a).

They have access to, and places with you, in your own Christian celebration. The absence of the awareness of God as Judge has produced a like decrease of the fear of God, so that we see the most blatant, mindless and unholy displays of activity. We can only understand that these people, both perpetrators and participants, are 'without fear,' as if God Himself is not observing, as if God Himself did not say in His word, "Be assured that your sins will find you out." We are in a dangerous condition, if we have not already fallen totally into deception, being taken in by too many manifestations that appear to be the power of God, uncritical and mindless in ourselves, lacking in the fear of God, and even emulating the very ones that are being described here.

Clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever (Jude vs. 12b - 13).

When the ministry collapses, they just establish another. There is no place like private enterprise America, in which a star can wander to another location, take on another name, employ a lawyer to establish another charter, and become a star again, sending out the public relations materials and the mass mailings. These wandering stars appear to be something, but after you have left one of their meetings or shut off the TV set, what remains? What effectual thing has been transacted? What significant ministry has been performed, other than that it has been entertaining or amusing?

We are at such a dangerous point that the Christian entertainment industry is being considered as the sixth of the five-fold ministries. We consider it to be as valid as any of the others, but we need to understand what entertainment is. It is sensationalistic, and purposes to fill the void of boredom and emptiness; it is a pleasing diversion from the things that are real and actual and which really deserve our attention as the Church in the earth that is called by God to be the ground and pillar of truth. For if we are escapists, if we feel a need to be diverted, if we cannot take the realities that are constituted by our life and our relationship together in the world in which we are, and to which we have been called in this hour, to whom then should we turn for the willingness to face those realities and to bring God's redemptive answer? The word 'amuse' means to negate thinking and contemplation, to stupefy or to stare stupidly, to occupy in a pleasing or agreeable way. The original meaning of the word is to 'divert the attentions of in order to deceive.'

If these are the symptoms of our condition as the Body of Christ, what then is our safety? The only context in which I can be comfortable with any expression of power as signs and wonders or miracles is not with

'God's great man of faith and power,' but with the power that is safely exercised in the context of the Body of Christ, the framework that God intended from the first, as the signs of the apostles, and the wonders that they performed to authenticate their callings. Power would then be in conjunction with apostolic character, and not with some 'wandering star' who is a cloud that does not hold water. That is the safe context in which God intended power from the first, and in which He desires to restore it; power as the expression of faith that works by love rather than 'faith' as a gimmick or repetition of a certain formula, even the reciting of scripture in order to obtain a certain end, thus making faith a method and a technique for manipulation. Faith is too holy a thing to be so employed, and in order to safeguard us from that misuse, we have been given the conjunction of faith that works by love.

We need to know each other and not be looking for the 'great man of faith and power' to come to town in order to lay hands upon us and magically deliver us from the ill that we retain because we had not the courage to call for the elders of the Church that they might anoint us with oil and pray the prayer of faith that we be forgiven our sins. Somehow it seems easier to have faith in the magical personality than the elder whom we see every day. It saves us from the embarrassment of having to express or to reveal anything about our lives that we want safely to conceal so that we can be happily delivered. Let the demonstration of power to the unsaved in the world as validating the apostolic message come within the structure that God intended, that establishes the safety and the sanity that keeps us from deception, because we know the elders and are known by them.

Why is it that we need so much healing, so much demonstration? Maybe God is wanting us to examine the root causes for it, and maybe we need to be reminded that, more often than not, there is a conjunction between sin and ill health. God does not want it magically relieved, but He wants to deal with the root of that disease, that agitation and tension that comes from a life not properly lived according to the word of God. There is something more important to God than that we should be relieved of a troubling symptom, namely, that we concern ourselves with the character of our life and the quality of our walk and the reality of our lives together as believers. Our unspoken resentment, bitterness and jealousy that we swallow down because we will not confess our faults one to another, that we might pray for one another and be healed: all of that evasion will surface eventually as something wrong in our minds or our bodies.

### **Whose Power?**

When experience as a quick-fix alternative is preferred to the disciplines of diligently seeking God, authentic apostolic Church life, denying self, carrying one's cross daily to follow Him, we put ourselves in a place of spiritual jeopardy, but is not the Lord near at hand to all who seek Him? What is the enduring benefit of having received merely some alleviation from the symptoms that were occasioned by serious defects of character, and yet retaining those same character defects? Whatever the future will reveal of the present 'revival' phenomena, perhaps the greatest thing will be the profound repentance of thousands upon recognizing their susceptibility to deception, their lack of elementary discernment, and their haste to run after demonstrations of power in atmospheres so contrary to God's known holiness and character.

Clearly, a power is at work, but the question is, whose? Who is it that is mediating an alternative and lesser joy to the immature, the carnal, and the undiscerning? Assuming that our fears are exaggerated and that the present phenomenon is of God, though admittedly marred only by certain excesses, in what ways will future lying signs and wonders be different from those with which we are presently being confronted? By what criteria will these differences be identified? Are we presently at the level of maturity and discernment by which these important distinctions can be made? By what means shall we come to that place if we are now prone to describe as 'enemies' those who are only raising questions about it? The very ridicule and censure brought by the advocates of this revival of those who attempt to do so makes suspect the very claims they espouse. The fact that something eventuates in blessing, release, or deliverance is no sure evidence or guarantee that it is of God.

For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders; so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect (Matt. 24:24).

The same powers of darkness which have wrought the oppressions through careless or unclean living can just as easily relieve them, restoring even relationships that have been broken and made miserable by them, in order to bring about a greater deception! Even the most rapturous 'love of God' can be a pseudo-sensation produced by spirits in the indiscriminate and slothful who are unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to seek God's face in truth. Is the 'hunger for God' in fact *that*, or a hunger for an experience of God that will assure the insecure soul that he is known and accepted of God? Is this not the unrecognized motive that

makes many pant after present-day prophets in hope of a 'prophetic' word of this kind? Does not this tendency promote the immaturity of such, rather than encourage them in the faith as sons? Do we not prefer to be effortlessly acted upon miraculously rather than diligently seek God on the basis of the promise of His Word?

### **The Power in His Name**

The emphasis on power and miracles in the Church today is rife, and it needs this balancing consideration:

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. And these signs shall accompany those who have believed: in My name they shall cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

So then when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed (Mark 16:15-20).

The very conclusion reminds us that one of our principal tasks is to preach, and that the Lord, who was working with them, confirmed the word of their preaching with the signs that followed. We need, therefore, to see the signs, the power and the miracles in the context of God's intent, not displacing the word, not being an activity independent of the word, but *confirming* the word. That is the way that it was at the inception, and that is the way God intends for it to be at the conclusion also, contrary to the tendency to become heady and carried away with so much emphasis on power evangelism that is now circulating in the Body of Christ.

My concern is that a power is being worked by a people who think that all they need to do is invoke the name of Jesus and employ a certain kind of methodology or technique. They need to understand and be reminded that 'in the name of Jesus' is not a catch phrase or a magical incantation that one recites in order to get the desired result. The name of Jesus is a powerful phrase that refers to what He is in Himself. The desired effect of the work or the prayer must be in keeping with what the Lord is in Himself. He is meek and lowly in heart, and the complete opposite of our swaggering to a ministry of healing because we have learned how to do it by invoking the name and expecting results with a kind of arrogance or self-serving exaltation that is not in keeping with the character of the Lord Himself; I wonder whether we are, in fact, doing something in the name of the Lord or by some other power.

It is even more sobering to read the Scriptures that immediately precede this passage:

And they went out, and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. And when they heard that He was alive, and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it. And after that, He appeared in a different form to two of them, while they were walking on their way to the country. And they went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them. And afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to all creation (Mark 16:8-15)."

The whole account is a chronicle of unbelief, a staggering unwillingness to believe the resurrection evidence, and an unwillingness to believe the testimony of the women who had received it from an angel. Having just upbraided them for their unbelief, Jesus immediately says, "Go into all the world." I have an overwhelming respect for the genius of God. This is perfect, and it stands as a sober warning to all of us in every generation who might be bitten by religious ambition, and who think that all we need to do is to learn 'how to' perform miracles, and we can go sailing forth and watch people being slain by the score, and witness tremendous miracles and power.

The Lord wants to remind us that the very men whom He commissioned to do and teach these things were those whom He had just rebuked for their hardness of heart and unbelief. To be reminded that we are flesh and blood, just as they, will keep us in a safe balance. We are not made of better stuff, and if we were confronted with the same phenomenon of resurrection, then in fact, we too would rightly balk. It is this kind of

recognition of our fallibility, our failure and our weakness as men that will save us from an arrogance and presumption that will degenerate into something far worse.

Not every one who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness (Matt 7:21-23)."

This is another caution and a healthy reminder that not every act, even though it has a consequence for good, is God's act. There is a power in the name of Jesus that evidently some can invoke, and see a result, but which will not impress God on the Last Day when all of us shall stand before Him as Judge, and our works will be tested as to whether they will pass through the fire. Many of us may be among those who say, "Lord, Lord, did we not do this and that, and prophesy, and perform many miracles?" The fact that the word 'many' is actually in this text indicates that they were indeed substantial works that really effected things and brought about real consequences, and yet He calls them those who practice lawlessness because they invoked His name, but He never knew them. It is a sobering admonition about invoking the name of Jesus as a kind of catch phrase that, even in its misuse, evidently has an efficacy that works. That means there is all the greater danger for deception. Would to God that it would work on only one condition, namely, that it came out of the mouth of one who was sent by God to do that work, a work that honored God and glorified the name of the Lord, that it was not some kind of a giddy thing done by a soulish or carnal believer who loves the sense of power and self-exaltation that comes when a miracle is worked by his prayer.

Who of us have come to a sanctification that believes he is above that kind of spiritual egotism, that he could not be touched in any area of self-exaltation if he should see mighty miracles performed at his hand and by his prayer when he invoked the name of Jesus? In the realm of power there is great risk of which we need to be mindful because the text here reminds us that they said, "Lord, did we not perform many miracles?" Performing a miracle is not a guarantee that it is God's work. Certainly, it is not a guarantee of our own sanctity, or the assurance that God has sent us, or that we are even in right relationship with Him. The mere invocation of the name of the Lord has become commonplace; anyone can vocalize the phrase, but does that sanctify it? Does that make it official? That is exactly the thing that is profane, the employment of the name of God to somehow validate the human and religious thing that we are promoting.

We need to be concerned for the works that *are* demonstrations of the power of God, that are a glory to the name of Jesus, because they were done in His name, in the spirit that is in keeping with the character of His name. They were done in a seemly way, in humility by persons who are not self-aggrandizing, not exalting themselves when they see an evidence of power when they invoke the Name. We need to see the use of the name of Jesus in exact proportion to the real knowledge of Him whose name we are invoking. Jesus calls any work as evil which is not born out of the knowledge of Him or for the glorification of His name. He will not allow us, without consequences, to manipulate power independently of the quality of our relationship with Him.

In fact, we cannot consider power and miracles that are independent of Jesus. They must always be in keeping with who He is in His own person, always with humility: "Learn of me for I am lowly and meek of heart." But we will only be meek in proportion to our union with Him who is lowly and meek. The unimpeachable mark of the true living God, His character and person, is His meekness. When that meekness is employed in conjunction with power, we have finally arrived as the sons and the daughters of the living God in Christ.

If we somehow think that we would never be among that many who say "Lord, Lord..." then we are, of all people, the most likely to be deceived. There is no more certain ground for deception than the smug assurance that we ourselves could never be candidates. If our flesh is hankering for great deeds and exciting miracles and demonstrations of power, *more* than a pure relationship with Jesus *in truth*, then we are already on the way down. The chief safety for those who will be the instruments of His power is that the first priority be this quality of relationship, *before* the expression and the manifestation of that power. What is our motive for power? Is it to honor and glorify Him? If our motive is to see the alleviation of sickness and distress, as honorable as that is, then it is not yet a pure motive. The first motive is the glorification of His name and not the response to human need.

### **The Lawless One**

It is clear that the 'lawless one' will be majoring in power, signs and wonders in order to deceive the unwary:

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then that lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness (2 Thess. 2:7-12).

Here is a further sobering warning: we will actually see legs grow out, visible things before us, unquestionable miracles, but the Lord calls them wicked. It is a miracle, but a lying miracle. Can we discern the one from the other, and on what basis are we making that distinction? We have got to see beyond the things that are apparent, and beyond the things that are employed to somehow sanctify them, when the fact of the matter is, they are evil. Iniquity or the spirit of lawlessness is a soulish desire for the gratification that comes with signs of power unrelated to the character and person in whose name they are invoked. Those signs and wonders will look like the real thing, and if we are so starved for a demonstration of power, or for something that will break the monotony of our predictable Sunday services, we will get swept in.

with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved (v.10).

It is not just the truth, or the acknowledgement of the truth that God makes the key to the issue of deception, but they did not receive the love of the truth. Truth needs to be loved, or we are not going to suffer the sacrifices by which truth is obtained. Confessing your faults one to another is being truthful. It is a painful and humiliating sacrifice to do so, and we will only do it because we love the truth. The love of the truth that will withstand whatever cost it requires is God's only provision against the deception that comes from lying signs and wonders. If we are only habituated to the effect of them, if we only want to see the excitement, if there is a void in our lives that wants to be titillated at the apparent miracle and power without asking too many questions about how it is performed, and by whom it is performed, and who is ultimately receiving the glory for the performance, then we are candidates for being deceived. Do we love the truth so much that we will raise those questions, that we will be alert to them, that we will not just be impressed by the performance?

Evidently, there is a conjunction between character and power that is important in God's sight, and equally, there is a conjunction between lying signs and wonders and unrighteousness. Unrighteousness in this context is any exercise of power ostensibly in the name of the Lord that has not to do with His glory and honor, but the glory and honor of the one who performs it. The establishing of one's ministry and reputation, and receiving the adoration of those who are the beneficiaries is unrighteous because it is a misuse of the Lord's name for self-aggrandizement.

There is something more important than being relieved from distressful symptoms of pain, something more important than impressive demonstrations of signs and wonders; it is the issue of God's fear and His glory. When that is not the palpating and central and jealous concern of His people, we make ourselves candidates for lying signs and wonders. The signs and wonders are a lie because they do not bring the attention of those who observe them, or those who are the beneficiaries of them, to the Lord Himself, but to the one who performs them in the Lord's name.

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

Here is the reference to the glory of God as being the factor for safety. How many of us would prefer to remain with the suffering of an unhealed bodily condition if that would more properly assure God's glory than our healing? There are sufferings that are not healed. The issue is not being delivered or dying, but the issue is, what does it please Him to do in His manifold wisdom that will affect His glory? God did not call us to healing, He did not call us to a whizz-bang Christendom and charismatic flair and exciting services and great personalities. He called us to gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The Apostate and the Apostolic**

We are in a time of separation, and what we are seeing in contemporary church life is the first expressions of what will distinguish the apostate from the apostolic, true Church. It is remarkable how taking opposition to

the issue of current 'revival' phenomena is already a factor in separating believers in churches. If indeed, there are powerful deceptions at work, we look to the day of reckoning in which those who have been deceived would recognize it, and repent to such a depth that they would be restored to God and made fit to stand in the Last Days, then the Lord will get His value out of what is presently taking place.

What we are experiencing is not so much the deception in itself, but the final consummation and consequence of a longer standing softness and shallowness in the faith, a giddiness that finally has resulted in 'signs and wonders' ministry. In other words, it has been made possible by what has preceded it, namely, the lack of a disciplined faith of a people who have been moved toward experience rather than the word, by soft pastors who are afraid to offend and thus speak only general biblical messages. It is a summation of an error of spirit that has had a long history, but now we are coming to the day of reckoning. It is not out of place to make it analogous to the crucifixion of Jesus by the Jewish nation in that it was not the sin in itself, but the final consummation and statement of a longer standing Jewish apostasy that finally had its outworking in that tragic crime. To say that that was the thing in itself, and not to see that it was preceded by a history of apostasy is to miss the point. We are reaping a harvest of what has been sown in the last decades of charismatic casualness, and lack of discipline now coming to roost in phenomena that are very grave. Our running after *places*, making of them a kind of Mecca, as if God is only to be found there, seems to me to be a continuation of the same kind of propensity.

In my view, we have come to the point of no return already, in view of the fact that the Church is so open and susceptible to the kinds of things that are now taking place. Maybe God wants us to pray for its lamentable condition. We have a whole generation being raised up that has never known the holiness of God and who talk about God prolifically, loosely, glibly and easily, but which God? I am even wondering if these central personalities have covenanted with someone other than God and do not even know it themselves, and in some Faustian way, they are receiving a power to affect bodies and lives that they thought was coming from God, but their knowledge of God is so sparse and so utterly questionable, that it may well be that they have been covenanting with some other thing that parades as light, and that responded to their cry for something to happen, and so they only *think* that they are communicating with God.

The prospects seem dim, but we need to be reminded again of the Last Days' deceptions, of false apostles who will transform themselves into apostles of Christ as it says in 2 Cor. 11:14, "And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers are also disguised to appear as the ministers of righteousness whose end shall be according to their works. We need to be sobered by statements of this kind. Satan's devices and wiles are uncanny, and that the most powerful of them is that which is not an appeal to our carnality, but an appeal to our spirituality as an angel of light, but light of what kind? My concern is that if we are missing it now, then what about the final deceptions that are to come, the future lying signs and wonders? Are we presently at the level of maturity and discernment by which these important distinctions can be made, and by what means shall we come to that place of maturity if we are now prone to describe as enemies those who are only raising these questions?

### **Prayer:**

Lord, we just appeal to You in Your great mercy. Come, my God, and breathe a sense of Yourself to congregations who have never known You as they ought, to, where Your fear is absent from the Church. We have made ourselves candidates for many things, deceptions of many kinds, in our arrogance and presumption. We lack a broken spirit. We are not chastised or affected by what is going on. We celebrate the things that are so contradictory to Your holiness and call it 'God.' Lord, we are in a low and pitiful state, and if these are not the Last Days' deceptions of which You have warned us, how shall we be guarded from that which shall come? How will we recognize it if we are unable *now* to exercise even the most minimal cautions and discernments? Lord, I am appealing to your mercy. Who is the greater candidate for deception than he who thinks that his spirituality is so secure that he cannot be deceived? Lord, we ask that You bring Your humility and brokenness to the Church to save it from these terrible things. We look to You, Lord, and know that You are going to have a Church that will be a glory to your Name forever, that Israel will be restored through the good offices of that Church, through its mercy and through its witness, and grant us fresh strength to go on and be what we ought to be in Your sight, and to Your people as these Last Days become indeed so much the fulfillment of that of which we have been warned. We look to You and thank You for Your precious provision of Your word, Your Spirit, the Church itself in its configuration as a Body that can speak the truth in love, that can exhort us daily, speak to each other as we ought, and receive from each other what can only come to us through Your Church, Your great sanctifying provision to save us, so that we might not have to stand before You with shame at the day of

Your appearing, but with joy to hear the precious words, "Well done good and faithful servants." In Your holy name we ask it. Amen.