

Can  
True Christians  
Be Deceived?

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## Can *True* Christians Be Deceived?

Many Christians believe that, once converted, they cannot be deceived. Does the Bible substantiate this? Read this eye-opening article to learn the *truth*!

Please notice the following quote from an article entitled, "Seven Proofs of the True Church of God":

Jesus said, "Take *heed* that no man *deceive* you. For MANY shall come in my name, SAYING, I am Christ [saying that Jesus is the Christ—not that "*they*" are Christ]; and shall *deceive many*!" (Matthew 24:4–5).

Jesus said it was going to get so bad that "If it were possible, they shall deceive the *very elect*!" (v. 24).

Brethren in God's Church—YOU are the "*elect*" of whom Jesus spoke! That is, you *are* this elect—IF you have been truly and completely CONVERTED, have been CONQUERED of God, *given* yourself to Him TOTALLY as a living sacrifice—and are now letting Him RULE in your own life!

If you are one of these *very elect*—then it is IMPOSSIBLE to "deceive" you any more! (*The Good News*, April 1968, p. 6).

But is this true?

If it is, then why did the Worldwide Church of God admit it was in error for nearly forty years on the doctrines of Pentecost and Divorce and Remarriage? If the Church was in error, then it was deceived. And if it was deceived, the idea that Christians cannot be deceived is false!

The doctrinal changes prove one of two things: Either we were in error in the past or we are in error now. Either we were deceived, or we are now deceived!

### If I Were the Devil

If I were the devil, how could I deceive true Christians? I do not mean people who think that they are Christians. I'm talking about people who were called and who understood the Truth! Could I find a way? Would it be possible?

Whatever I did as the devil would have to be very clever, and very subtle. It would have to be done gradually so that even the ministry would not recognize it. So, where would I begin?

### **Don't Question**

First, I would convince people to follow a "cause" or "leadership" without question. I would tell them their responsibility is to do only what they are told—that God holds the leadership responsible and if the leadership goes off into error, God will correct it. I would ignore all Bible instructions which teach personal responsibility and an intimate relationship with God (Romans 14:22). I would never bring examples which show how the people suffered when the leaders went astray (1 Kings 14:15–16). If questioned, I would say God will clean up the church, but I would never tell them *they* are the church (1 Corinthians 12:13–14). In this way I would gain their trust so that once they had confidence in the leadership, they would cease proving. I would encourage them not to ask serious questions because the leadership is responsible for everything—even their salvation.

### **"Lots of Literature"**

Next, I would inundate them with church-oriented literature. I would constantly tell them their need to read this literature. I would keep it coming in such volume that they would have little chance to study the Bible itself. Then as time went along, I'd "water down" what was said in order to "soften them up" for compromise. In this way they would get used to "questionable" practices which would become normal. I would see that the staff members were good writers, able to keep up interest, but I would edit out anything that "smacked" of conviction. Prophecy would be emphasized in order to generate alarm, but I'd let the readers know that safety could be found in the confines of an organization.

### **Control Ministry**

Also, as the devil, I would see that the church gained complete financial control over the ministry. And while I would give the ministry good salaries and a high standard of living, I would see that their assets were small. I would encourage them to set the example of giving to the church, but make no provision whatsoever for their future. They would then be completely dependent on the church and would find it extremely difficult to quit, especially if they were middle-aged and it meant "starting all over." I'd give them lease cars

and completely furnished homes so that their personal possessions were few. I'd encourage them not to save. And I'd move them around periodically so they couldn't put any "roots down."

With this kind of ministry there would be little opposition if I wanted to change doctrines.

### **Change Doctrines**

Now I would concentrate on doctrine. My goal would be to get everyone to accept "change." Or "progress." Now for my trump card. Since I had already convinced the membership to accept the leadership without question, I'd introduce these doctrines without real proof. I would announce the change with a minimum explanation and promise literature for clarification, but I would greatly delay publishing this literature. I'd make everybody believe the entire ministry approved it.

### **Practice Changes**

Then I would get the membership to practice the change. I would do this with "minor" doctrinal changes also, except I wouldn't announce them. I'd tell people privately. As more people changed, the reluctant members would feel it must be all right. Soon large numbers would be practicing these changes without proof. Even most of the opposition would yield; and since there was no resistance from the ministry, the entire membership would assume the changes were Scriptural.

### **Remove Opposition**

The last thing, then, would be to remove the opposition. I would handle each individual privately, and never tell the membership the real reason for any dismissal. It was "a leave of absence for health reasons," or a "sabbatical," or "he resigned because he was unsure." (Most people wouldn't stop to think that people don't resign when they are unsure. They resign when they are sure.)

If I could pick key people to report dissenters to church authorities, I'd do so. I'd build up an "ironclad" case against any who opposed me. If the dissenter didn't yield to my demands, I'd assassinate his character publicly, if necessary, and inspire a gossip campaign. I'd minimize his sincerity, conviction, and loyalty to God and the Truth—and I'd attack him

for being disloyal, but I'd never really say how he was disloyal. In this way I would neutralize any positive influence he might have had on anyone.

With these accomplishments, I could easily deceive true Christians!

### **What Does the Bible Say?**

Does the Bible say it is possible that this could happen?

Jesus said, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24). The words "it were" are not in the original. The context of Matthew, chapter twenty-four, shows the events leading up to Christ's return. The warning given here (v. 24) has to do with accepting "the return" of a false Christ. It is not talking about doctrine!

But Paul clearly says there will be an apostasy prior to the return of Jesus Christ. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away [apostasy] first, and that man of sin be revealed . . ." (2 Thessalonians 2:3). The Bible says there will be an abandonment of the Truth! So Christians can be deceived; otherwise Paul would not have warned them (2 Thessalonians 2:1, 3).

Furthermore, he said, "And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words" (Colossians 2:4).

And Peter wrote, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you . . . . And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Peter 2:1–2).

So Christians can be deceived!

### **The Syndrome**

Deceived Christians would not know they were deceived. There would be obvious signs, however, which would constitute an entire syndrome.

## Personality Cult

First, they would be members of a personality cult. They wouldn't realize or call it such. In fact, they would be offended if so accused. Regardless of how they appeared to the world as to following a personality, they would adamantly deny it.

Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). But few members of a personality cult stop to analyze how their leader follows Christ, especially if the private life of the leader is secret; and if they do question certain practices they are told, "It's none of your business!" They would not realize their example *is* their business. As Paul said, "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life . . ." (2 Timothy 3:10).

Instead, they would be encouraged to participate in standing ovations. Their adoration would border on worship. Their leader could do no wrong. If told about his foibles or sins, they would refuse to believe it. They would not face the facts even if the evidence were undeniable.

## Do the "Work"

They would be heavily involved in a "Work." And while this is noteworthy in itself, if this "Work" deviated, they would fail to see it. This is because they would put the "Work" above the *purpose of the Work*. In short, the "Work" would become an end in itself. Regardless of how secular it became, the people would still be doing "the Work." Anything done in the name of the "Work" would be "of God." As one minister said, "Jesus Christ has shown us He wants a commissary for the brethren here in this area." A few years later when it was closed, how many wondered if "Jesus Christ has now shown us He doesn't want a commissary here?" The same could be said about a grade and high school, an English campus, and a press.

So the danger is the failure to monitor the purpose, goal and methods of a "Cause" or "Work." To assume this will be done for you without any responsibility on your part is a shirking of personal obligation. And once an organization veers off course, it is practically impossible to correct.

## Too Much for Granted

Next would be the failure to continually "prove all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). This would be based on the assumption that the leadership was impervious to error. Yet God says, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). At what point does one stop studying? At what point does one stop proving?

The Bible warns, "For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him [with me]" (2 Corinthians 11:4). It is one thing to lack a solid foundation, but even worse to throw a foundation away. "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (Hebrews 5:12).

Yes, it is easy to take things for granted. How long has it been since Church of God brethren really studied God's Word? One man said after reading the opening page on the Pentecost study paper, "I just read the first page and that was enough to convince me." If he hadn't assumed the church could not be wrong, wouldn't he have been more careful?

The failure to prove all things, and the apathy in God's Church today is appalling. This quote by a member of the Doctrinal Committee in a letter recently written to a church member serves to illustrate:

On the question of Pentecost, the Bible is somewhat vague about whether the emphasis should be on 'the morrow' or on 'the Sabbath.' We have evidence that this was interpreted in more than one way. Some said the Sabbath had to fall within the Days of Unleavened Bread while others said the Wave Sheaf day had to fall within them. The church had to make a decision. I could see arguments on both sides. But the decision was finally based on Joshua 5:11 because the wording *seemed* to have Leviticus 23:9–22 in mind. If so, then the Wave Sheaf day—but not necessarily the Sabbath which the Wave Sheaf day follows—would have to fall during the Week of Unleavened Bread.

*In my opinion* this question was much less clear cut than the general question of Pentecost. However, this affects only one Pentecost in ten. Even if we should be in error, we are still keeping the time ninety percent correctly instead of one hundred percent in error! In any case God understands the difficulty

and will consider the sincerity of the heart if we should have made a mistake (Letter, September 1975—emphasis ours throughout).

If the Doctrinal Committee can't prove the Truth, how can the members? No wonder so many have an attitude of indifference and apathy toward God's Word! Instead of proving what is the real truth, they are told to just believe the Doctrinal Committee and God will understand.

Yes, God will understand! *He will understand how careless, indifferent and lacking in fear His people are!*

### **Practice What You Know**

A fellow minister once said concerning the Truth, "If you don't live it, you don't believe it." This is true. When people in office do not practice what they preach, what can be expected of laymembers? One of the failures in the Worldwide Church of God today is the failure to live up to the Truth. But is the solution to lower the standards?

The present trend in the church is the denial of God's Spirit as a source of power to overcome. Instead married couples are told that if they cannot get along, it is all right to divorce:

Even baptized Church members sin and thus alienate their mates from time to time. If they are so unforgiving and vindictive that they cannot find it in their hearts to forget the sin of the offending party they may have a divorce if they so wish (Letter, September 2, 1975).

Is this practicing God's Truth? Is this using the power of God's Spirit to overcome? Or is this the failure of the church to teach what God requires, and the failure of the Christian to overcome?

### **Follow the Crowd**

People follow a crowd. And so do Christians if the crowd they follow is "Christian." As Peter warned, "And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Peter 2:2). It is incredible to see the long-cherished truths of God now labeled as error, while doctrines embraced by the professing Christian

world are now called "truth"! Anyone who does not accept these counterfeits is labeled "bitter," "too stubborn to change," or "self-righteous."

But the Bible says, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil . . ." (Exodus 23:2). And again, ". . . beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Peter 3:17).

If you "follow the crowd," you are headed for deception—*not* a falling away "from the church," but a falling away from *the Truth!*

It's time to realize true Christians can be deceived! It's time to discern the age in which we are living. It's time we perceive what is taking place, and take necessary steps to see that we are not deceived!