

Larry Tomczak: Understanding Deception for Non-Dummies

Recently, I did a commentary “Understanding the End Times for Non-Dummies,” playing off the “For Dummies” series that has sold over 250 million copies helping people learn important subjects in an easy to understand way. This second installment deals with the dangers of deception which Jesus warned was the primary sign prior to His Return.

No genuine Christian has the luxury of taking this subject lightly. How a person spends this life and where they’ll spend eternity depends on being discerning at the end of the age. We’ve got to learn to discern because “discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong but right and almost right.” – Charles Spurgeon

Satan is a master at deceiving people, especially in obfuscating the beautiful and simple message of the gospel. “But I fear that somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve through his trickery, so your minds might be led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3).

“You Must Be Born Again”

It’s been 50 years since the release of “Clap Your Hands!” (a book I wrote that miraculously reached over a quarter million people, leading multitudes to a genuine “born-again” experience that Jesus stated was required in John 3:3-7). He told this to a very religious and moral theologian!

I still hear from people who say the book helped bring them out of the deception of believing that being baptized, going to mass and confession, doing good deeds and following all the rules of the Catholic church was what enables a person at death to merit placement in purgatory to hopefully accumulate enough grace to one day earn a spot in heaven.

The Bible does not teach this but instead, “For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

Millions of sincere religious people believe the deception. Martin Luther ignited the Reformation in 1517 addressing this error of “salvation by works” and tragically this deception lingers to this day.

Scripture teaches people are saved when they do as God commands (Acts 17:30) and genuinely repent of their sin, put their faith totally in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross, confess Him as Lord and Savior risen from the dead and receive the “free gift of eternal life” (Rom. 6:22). We are not saved by what we’ve done, but by what Jesus did on the cross that was sufficient for the sins of all mankind.

A person’s eternal destiny is at stake here, so this deception has to be addressed. If I had not humbled myself, repented and trusted Christ alone and His sacrificial, substitutionary death, I would, as the Bible teaches, tragically end up in hell.

Examples of Deception

Recently, NFL superstar Aaron Rodgers had a catastrophic injury on the fourth play of the season for his new team, the New York Jets. I prayed for this 38-year-old “Christian.” When I researched a recent interview, he shared about his wonderful Christian experience as a young man, mission trips and commitment to Christ. Then he pivoted to say he now sees “religion as a crutch;” doesn’t believe in people being saved or unsaved or heaven and hell; and he likes the Dalai Lama. Sad and scary.

I was privileged to serve as a teacher in the longest running revival in America’s history, the Brownsville Revival, where a young teenage girl, passionate for Jesus, sang before each

invitation as scores streamed forward to get right with God. Last week she posted a statement expressing her turning away from Christianity to some newfound spiritual experience. Multitudes across America were shocked. Sad and scary.

Waiting to pick up my order of Thai food last week, I engaged with a mother sitting at the counter with her 10-year-old daughter. She brimmed with enthusiasm for her daughter's project at school showing me artwork depicting some fantasy land where there is no religion because all of us need "the inner light within and the positive focus of connecting with cosmic consciousness."

Before leaving, I gave her my personal testimony tract and prayed. Sad and scary.

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Vivek Ramaswamy, 38-year-old Indian-Republican candidate for president, was interviewed and asked about Jesus Christ. His response: "Jesus was a son of God but not the Son of God." Deception with chilling consequences.

Last Days Deception

Deception is rampant today and our only hope is a Third Great Awakening ignited by humble intercession, national repentance and courageous truth tellers who can discern deception and counter the lies.

"During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act." – George Orwell, "1984"

Amidst the craziness of "woke" deception and widespread religious apostasy the Bible warns us to be prepared.

"Now the Spirit clearly says that in the last times some will depart from the faith and pay attention to seducing spirits

and doctrines of devils, speaking lies..." (1 Tim. 4:1-2).

"Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. For that day will not come unless a falling away (Gk. "apostacy") comes first..." (2 Thess. 2:3).

"For the time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine, but they will gather to themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, having itching ears, and they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

"Anyone who teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ... has a morbid disposition for controversy and verbal disputes, from which come envy, strife, blasphemies, evil speculations, constant disputes by men of corrupt minds, being destitute of the truth..." (1 Tim. 6:3-5). Be careful on the Internet!

4 Practical Precautions

1. Stay sensitive to the Holy Spirit. "But when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

2. Stay in a biblically grounded church with leaders of strong character. "So we may no longer be children, tossed here and every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men by craftiness with deceitful scheming" (Eph. 4:14).

3. Stay humble and teachable. Invite input and correction. "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). C.S. Lewis said, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less."

4. Stay in Scripture. "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:16).

Here's the Deal: Years ago, I had a "divine appointment" with Billy Graham. At the end of our brief conversation, I'll never

forget what he told me as he pointed to his Bible, "Stay in the Book. Stay in the Book." Amen. {eoa}

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