

# BE NOT DECEIVED

*Vince Conroy, March 15, 2026*

I like to go back to the beginning of the story when looking at the truth of scripture and the Christian life.

## Genesis 3.15-17

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

...then we see that God did not want Adam to be alone and he placed Eve in the Garden with him

## Genesis 4.1-4

1 Now the serpent was more **crafty** than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

4 But the serpent said to the woman, "**You will not surely die.** 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Our adversary, the devil and the demonic forces at play in this world and in our lives have a primary weapon they use against humanity -- **LIES AND DECEPTION.**

For various reasons we are ALL SUSCEPTABLE TO BEING DECEIVED just as we read here in Genesis.

Some other areas where deception is at work

- Who God is, and His character
- The nature of who we are as individuals, created in the image of God, the imago dei
- The pervasiveness and consequences of sin at work in the world and in our lives
- About others in our lives, especially our brothers and sisters
- False teachers and false prophets etc
- We are really good at deceiving ourselves

- Any other ways we can be deceived?

### **James 1.22**

*22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.*

### **Galatians 6.3**

*3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself*

*The New Testament is full of warnings about the threat of deception.*

From Jesus' first major discourse to the final visions of Revelation, there is a consistent warning that truth is under constant siege by the deceiver.

### **John 8.31**

*"If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."*

### **John 18.37**

*For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." 38 Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"*

## HOW TO AVOID BEING DECEIVED

Here is a summary of the practical ways the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament instruct believers to avoid being deceived.

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### 1. Evaluate fruit, not Just charisma and outward appearances

Jesus emphasized that spiritual "experts" and prophets should be judged by their character and the long-term results of their lives, rather than their words or miracles.

- **The "Fruit" Test:** In Matthew 7, Jesus warns that you will recognize false teachers by their "fruits" (their actions, lifestyle, and the spiritual health of their followers).
- **The Power of Performance:** Jesus warned that even those who perform miracles or cast out demons in his name might be "workers of lawlessness" (Matthew 7:22-23). Power does not equal truth.

### 2. Know the Scriptures

The New Testament writers suggest that the best way to spot a counterfeit is to be intimately familiar with the genuine article.

- **The Berean Standard:** In Acts 17, the Bereans were commended because they didn't just take the Apostle Paul's word for it; they "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."
- **Guard the Deposit:** Paul repeatedly told Timothy to "guard the good deposit" of sound teaching, implying that deception often starts by slowly drifting away from foundational truths.
- **Example:** Bank tellers are able to spot counterfeit cash because they have become so familiar with the real thing when a counterfeit comes along they can spot it easily.

### 3. Test the Spirit and the message

The Apostles provided specific "litmus tests" for messages that claim to be from God.

- **The Christological Test:** 1 John 4:1-3 instructs believers to "test the spirits." A primary test was whether the teacher affirmed the true nature of Jesus (specifically his incarnation and divinity).

*4 Beloved, <sup>t</sup>do not believe every spirit, but <sup>u</sup>test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for <sup>v</sup>many <sup>w</sup>false prophets <sup>x</sup>have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup>By this you know*

*the Spirit of God: <sup>y</sup>every spirit that confesses that <sup>z</sup>Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> and every spirit <sup>a</sup>that does not confess Jesus is not from God*

- **The Gospel Test:** Paul famously told the Galatians that even if an *angel* from heaven preached a gospel different from the one they first received, they should reject it (Galatians 1:8).

*1.8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.*

#### 4. Beware of "Tickled Ears"

Deception often succeeds because it tells people what they *want* to hear rather than what is true.

- **Catering to Desires:** Paul warned that in later times, people would gather teachers who "suit their own passions" to tell them what their "itching ears" want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3).
- **Self-Correction:** Avoiding deception requires a willingness to be corrected. If a teaching only affirms your existing biases and never challenges your behavior, the New Testament suggests being cautious.
- Our own confirmation bias causes us to more readily accept information which agrees with your pre-existing beliefs and concepts and discount information and opinions which contradict our beliefs.

#### 5. Prioritize Humility and Sobriety

A recurring theme is that pride and emotional frenzy make one vulnerable to being misled.

- **Be Sober-Minded:** Peter and Paul frequently use the term "sober-minded." This suggests a calm, clear-headed approach to faith rather than being swept away by emotional hype or "every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14).
- **The Deception of Self:** James 1:22 warns that we can deceive *ourselves* if we listen to the word but do not do what it says. Active obedience is seen as a safeguard for the mind.
- Examine ourselves regularly

- Use the “Prayer of Examen” as a daily spiritual practice:
  1. Become aware of God’s presence
  2. Review the day with gratitude and asking forgiveness where needed
  3. Pay attention to your emotions
  4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it
  5. Look toward tomorrow.

## 6. Stay Connected to your Community

Isolation is often where deception takes root.

- **Body of Christ:** The New Testament portrays the church as a "body" where different members provide checks and balances. Ephesians 4 notes that mature leadership is given specifically so that the community is no longer "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine."
- Do not be isolated
- Be humble with each other
- Each of us has a piece of the whole truth

## 7. Stay connected to Jesus -- He is the vine and your his branches

*15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

LET'S PRAY