



Dangers of Spiritual Deception
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I have a very heavy burden on my heart tonight that will not be easy to communicate. For the last 15 years I have been having many opportunities to be in leadership conferences. Again and again I have sought the Lord: “What shall I speak to these men about? What should I share?” Time is so limited.

First of all, as someone who has the privilege of being in many different parts of the world, I can say to you that God is moving around the world, seemingly in an unprecedented way. Approximately 200 new churches are being opened somewhere in the world almost every day. This is incredible! Millions are coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. There is one church in Brazil with over 25,000 members. Now you may be from an area where you are not seeing any great response. If you see a church of 30, no 30,000 you will be shouting from the treetops praises to God. But those of you who are labouring in hard areas, barren areas, unresponsive areas, need to realize that there is one Church, and as some members suffer, we all suffer, and as some rejoice we all rejoice.

We are seeing God work, we are seeing a great moving out of workers. We had a night of prayer recently in one country, a country where the church is growing. A thousand people came to that night of prayer, and 500 of them stayed till four in the morning. Many outstanding Christian leaders in that country came to that prayer meeting. William MacDonald, author of that tremendous book, True Discipleship, came to me after that meeting, and he said he believed that we should organize these nights of prayer across the country and across the world. I am convinced that if we are going to see further thrusting forth of labourers to the harvest field, we need nights of prayer; We need days of prayer. It is at times like this when the Spirit of God can deal with us, break us, and show us what His will is.

One of the reasons I share this message is because I see that Satan has made every Christian leader a primary target. Some of you may not think that you are a great Christian leader, but the Church is in such a state and in some places is growing so rapidly that people are quickly moved into leadership. Sometimes before they have been trained, sometimes before they have learnt reality in prayer, reality in witnessing, reality in relationships, they have already moved into leadership. I notice that when this happens, Satan makes them a primary target. It seems the moment a man really commits his life, decides to do the will of God, and puts his life on the altar. Satan makes him a primary target. It says in the book of James that we should be doers of the Word and not hearers only; Otherwise we deceive ourselves. I believe Satan has a plan of deception for Christian leaders.

I don't know where I would be today if it wasn't for regular days of prayer when I went up into the mountain with a good book by Tozer or Andrew Murray or someone else and allowed God to penetrate the inner recesses of my heart and bring me to repentance again and again. I would ask you when was the last time you had a day of prayer alone with God? We set aside days for everything else. We have days of feasts, we have holidays to celebrate Christmas and some other days. There are all kinds of days that are very important. We have lots of days in which we work all day. When is the last time you had a day alone with God? I don't believe we

can stand against the fiery darts of Satan if we don't have those times alone with God. When was the last time you had a half day? I have had Christian leaders come to me and confess they have no time with God at all. Even in our own work we have leaders stand up and share that they have no communion with God. No wonder we see so many casualties. From among those of us that are heavily involved in Christian work around the world, it seems that every month there is another casualty. A subtle invasion of the forces of hell is taking place night and day and Christian leaders are the targets.

It says in the book of Proverbs, "The adulteress will hunt for the precious life," and "bread eaten in secret is pleasant; But her guests are in the depths of hell," It was an upsetting thing when I arrived in Europe about 18 or 19 years ago and I found out that a man had been arrested in a particular country for seducing one third of the girls in his own Bible school. The church didn't catch him. The police caught him and he was put in prison, and it went into the headlines of the papers. Everybody knew he was a leading evangelist; Everybody knew he was a Christian leader. Can you imagine what a setback this kind of thing is to the Church of Jesus Christ?

Maybe these things would not happen if we as Christian leaders would sit down more and count the cost and examine our own lives to see if there are areas of deception that are coming in, that will eventually lead us to the final fall, and to the scandal that a fall will bring.

I want to share with you just 10 areas of deception. I am going to be brief, and you are going to have to study some of these on your own. These are 10 areas which I have seen in almost every nation I have visited: Satan's work of deceiving.

C.S. Lewis said we all have the tendency to think, but not act. And if we go on thinking and feeling without acting, someday we will not be able to act. I was reading the same thing in A.W. Tozer's amazing little booklet *Paths to Power*. He also brought up the same principle, that if we go on for long without obeying what the Lord teaches us, soon we are unable to obey. We develop what I call "spiritual schizophrenia". Many Christian leaders have told me this was true in their own lives. They have the words, they have the terminology, they have the theology, but they haven't got the fire, they haven't got the fight, they haven't got the reality. There is deception going on. It is possible for men of God to be deceived. One of the most spiritual men of God in the fifties in the United States became the founder of a false cult.

I believe we need to understand more of Satan's devices. Let us not overemphasize Satan. I prefer to meditate more on the angels than on the demons. But it says in God's Word, "We are not ignorant of Satan's devices," and in Ephesians Paul tells us to take "the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." That is something we need to know about. What are these areas?

1. The Word, Prayer and Worship

First of all, the greatest area of deception is for the servant of God to reflect the Word, prayer and personal worship. You say this is incredibly basic. Yes, that's where the warfare is. And I wonder if there are some of us who are in Christian work, who are leaders. You are responsible

for 20 or 30 people, maybe more, and you know if you're honest that you are reflecting the Work of God.

You used to memorize God's Word when you were a young Christian, but now you are too busy for memorization. You even tell your new converts to memorize God's Word. But when we become a Christian leader do we no longer need to memorize God's Word? In my own life, I discovered this is still my best approach to God's Word, because my burden is not how much I can get out of God's Word in my head; It is how much God's Word can get hold of me. And I find that intensive meditations on the Word of God, any reading, any form of study, is something that brings power and also delivers and gives us protection. When Satan tried to tempt Jesus, He used the Word of God. I believe we need to memorize God's Word.

George Duncan, a great preacher from Scotland, speaking to a group of ministers at the Keswick Convention on his own experience on counselling, assumed that many of them had no prayer life. No wonder the mid-week prayer meeting has stopped and is dying in many churches. If we as Christian leaders do not have any prayer life, if we don't know the reality of prayer, of intercession and of confession, how can we lead God's people? Can the blind lead the blind? Where would we lead them to? Confusion and prayerlessness. A leading Christian magazine some time ago asked me to write an article. They wanted me to title it, 'What Happened to the Prayer Meeting?' That is the subtle, deceptive plan of the enemy: To wipe the prayer meeting out of the church. We replace it with gospel films, we replace it even with Bible teaching. As important as it is, Bible teaching is not a substitute for prayer.

And then personal worship. What an interesting thing it is when we have a man leading the congregation in public worship who is experiencing no reality in personal worship. Can we get water out of a dry well? I believe the highest calling of a Christian leader is not his work, not his organization, not his people. There are too many empire builders in the Christian world today. I believe the highest calling today is worship. Many of us have been radically affected by that amazing book, *Destined for the Throne*. Perhaps you won't agree with everything you read in that book. But you cannot deny it is a call to intercession. It's a call to getting our priorities right.

2. Discipline of the Body

The second area of deception I call the neglect of the body and the neglect of basic discipline. We had the privilege in London during our recent conference to have Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones with us. If I could only take one book and my Bible into prison, that one book I would take would be *Spiritual Depression* by Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones. As he spoke to us in that conference in London, he emphasized the balance between the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the disciplined life. We should never make the mistake of putting these two things one against the other. You may have a crisis in your life, a crisis experience with the Holy Spirit, but if that crisis is not followed by a process, you end up in an abscess, and we find that all over the world. One man who greatly emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in his ministry, wrote in a magazine article recently that 50% of the men he was with 15 years ago, who were

experiencing blessing from the Holy Spirit, have been wiped out today, morally or in some other way.

Beloved, we are not in some kind of game. We are not in a religious contest, competing with other world religions. We are in a spiritual warfare, and if we don't know how, and don't learn how to wear the armour, we are going to be wiped out, even though we may keep it from the public eye through a lot of clever manipulations and clever maneuvers.

I believe we need a great emphasis on discipline in every area. I believe men in the ministry need a definite programme of physical exercise to keep their bodies in condition. Then we won't have so many disappearing at 50 years of age through heart condition. I believe we need to practice discipline in every area. Jesus Christ said, "If you love me, keep my commandments. It is not, "If you love me, go to church" ; "If you love me, sing my choruses," I am sure Jesus loves all that. "If you love me, keep my commandments." When we see the clear teaching of the Word of God in this whole area of discipline, I believe there needs to be more obedience, more reality.

As we practice discipline in small areas, then when the big tests come, when the big temptations come, I believe we will be able to stand firm. And we have got to teach our new converts the reality of disciplined life, and what it is to live by faith and not by feelings. There is nothing wrong with feelings. Tozer said that feelings are like music. The music is wonderful. We like music. We can march to music. But with or without music, with or without the feelings, we have got to move out in the spiritual warfare. And sometimes there are periods of dryness and we've got to learn to stand against the subtle attacks of the enemy when those periods of dryness come upon our souls.

I want to read something that has been a great help to me on this subject. This is a quotation from a man named H.A. Hodges. In his book *The Unseen Warfare* he says: "This fervour we sometimes have as a young Christian not to be confused with our first love) is especially characteristic of beginners, and this drying up should be welcomed as a sign that we are getting beyond the first stage; don't try to retain it. For too long for its return in the midst of dryness is to refuse to grow up. It is to refuse the cross. By our steady adherence to God, when the affections are dried up and nothing is left but the naked will clinging blindly to Him, to Christ, the soul is purged of self-regard and trained in pure love." If we had a little more of this kind of emphasis I believe we would see many fewer casualties in the work of God. William Carey, that great missionary said: "Give us plodders, men who will stick, men who know the reality of the disciplined life, and in times of dryness and agony of soul, they go on and on." Someone once said to me: "Never get out of a train when you are in a tunnel." If you are in a period of darkness in your Christian life, this is not the time to make major decisions. This is the time to get back to the cross and then God will lead you and you will find His place.

3. Reading and Learning from Others

The third area of deception is the neglect of reading and the neglect of learning from others. In Hebrews 10:24 we are told to encourage one another. In the Greek I think the meaning would

be more “to prod on” We need to prod brothers and sisters on, and I am convinced that sometimes we neglect learning from others. You know how you can tell when a man is headed for a false cult or for extremism? When he no longer feels that he can learn from others. Super-spirituality is a plague in the 20th Century Church. Think of what happened to the movement of the Children of God. This man started as a Christian & Missionary Alliance minister. He was embittered. And he became the founder of one of the most ugly false cults the world has ever known, where women are now going out into the streets and giving their bodies in sex to bring men supposedly to God, supposedly to show them the love of God. They have got all the terminology, but they have got it all twisted through the ugly satanic deceptive power of the evil one.

Take heed lest you fall. We need one another. Paul went to the churches with much exhortation. But sometimes we can't receive exhortation, because of our pride, especially if that person giving the exhortation is younger than we are, or maybe he is not in our same denomination, or some other reason. Some of the things I've learned in life I've learned even from children. My own three teenagers know how to give me exhortation. They know how to point out the things that I said that were not quite consistent with what I am doing at home. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, the Word of God says, some great things can happen.

I've also been greatly helped by women, and I find quite a few men who don't like to learn anything from women. Some of us with strong temperaments are natural extremists. Thanks to the writings of the woman named Eugenia Price, some of my extremism got knocked off a few years ago. The Lord can speak through many different ways.

God can speak to us from a book. We may not necessarily agree with everything in that book. Most of the books I read -- I don't agree with everything. I am sure if you read any of my books you won't agree with everything. The only book we've got to agree with totally is God's Word. Sometimes we meet people who say they don't read Christian books. That's usually another mark of someone going into extremism. When that man preaches in his church, he doesn't just read the Bible. He preaches. And I believe Christian leaders need to listen to the preaching and read the books of other Christian leaders, even those they may not fully agree with. And it is a blessing if we do that. Let us not neglect this area. Let us not be deceived through some kind of spiritual pride or other tricky method of Satan.

4. Family Life

Fourthly, one of the greatest areas of deception is in connection with the family and the wife. I am amazed how men of God can neglect their families. I was moving in that same direction. Many years ago, when my children were very, very young, the Lord showed me this was a priority. I cancelled meetings, I had to learn to say “No.” Some people don't know how to say “No.” They accept every invitation that comes to go anywhere. But when their wife gives an invitation she would like to take a little time, she is the only one who gets a “No.”

Satan is attacking the home, and I would commend to you some of these great books on the Christian home and on marriage. Again, I meet some men who are too proud to read any books on marriage. They feel they already know. They may be in for a few surprises when some of their children end up in jail or maybe something worse. I was just reading this morning about the sons of Eli and what a heartbreaking story that is. It can happen to any of us. What is the next generation going to be? At the same time I never point my finger at a pastor who may have a son or daughter who has gone astray. I think we must be careful of that because there are many forces, even on godly homes, that sometimes in an unpredictable way seem to steal away at least one of the children. And this is an area where we need spiritual balance. I think we should have at least one day a week that we give over to the family. Sometimes men can be very careless concerning the needs of their wife, and Satan has used this again and again. I believe this is probably the number one area where Satan is attacking.

5. Personal Evangelism and Outreach

The fifth area of deception is that Christian leaders are neglecting personal evangelism, visitation, personal contact and outreach. How easy it is to be caught up with the mechanics of the work. How easy it is to run from one administrative job to the next. Of course most of us are preaching and are in the public eye. But there is a great danger that soon we are preaching that which we are not in reality living. We are telling others to go out and bring men to Jesus Christ when we ourselves haven't been involved in this kind of work. I tell you I have to stand firmer than ever to make sure that every week I am out in evangelism. If you want to see a leader trained and disciplined, take him with you. Do things together. Don't just sit in your living room and teach him a Bible verse. People are going to learn by what they see.

The Apostle Paul was probably as busy as most of us, yet we find him in the marketplace, we find him in Acts 20:20 in the public ministry and going from house to house. So many young people have shared with me that they don't see reality in their leaders. I know much time has to be given to administration, even more time to counselling. But certainly we can find a half day or a day a week in which we can get out and face lost men. This helps us remain spiritually vital. It puts something into our total lives to be involved eyeball to eyeball, man to man, with people who don't know Jesus Christ. Sometimes in our Christian institutions we get a sort of holy outlook and we don't have any contact with anybody except other Christians. Then we start to pick each other apart. By nature we have to find fault somewhere, so we see fault with one another. If we got involved with people in the world with all their problems, murder cases, drunken cases, divorce, we would see that some of the problems of our fellow Christians aren't so great. Some of us can become very naive and very unrealistic about what life really is if we don't get out with the unconverted. Beware of the subtle deception in that area. Take the example of the Apostle Paul from the book of Acts.

6. Food, Sleep, Sex and Money

Sixthly, there is the great neglect of discipline when it comes to the area of food, sleep, sex, money and details. A man of God once said to me that there are three main areas where Christian leaders get wiped out-sex, money, pride.

Sex (the wrong use of it), money (materialism), and pride. You might want to write that in the front of your Bible: "O Lord, keep me from these three fiery darts of Satan." I've been amazed as I have been involved in worldwide missions to discover the deceptive power of the enemy in the area of money. Let us not think that only rich people are deceived by material goods. It is my conviction that poor people are more easily deceived by materialism than wealthy people. And those of us who think we know some victory in this area, we need to beware because different phases of life bring different temptations. Money is the root of many evils. What a heartbreak it was many years ago when I was sent by a mission agency to a country not far from here and uncovered a hundred thousand dollar embezzlement by a missionary. More and more we find on the mission field the misuse of money. If God commits to you a small amount of money, account for it all. Be totally honest. If He commits to you large amounts, the same principle is true.

Then this area of sex. I want to recommend to you the book *Eros Defiled*. For over twenty years I have been looking for good books on this subject, because often I lecture on what the Bible says about sex. Sometimes in our churches we never talk about sex. There are 300 verses in the Word of God on the subject of sex, but we don't talk about it in the church. And then we claim to preach the whole counsel of God. We are not preaching the whole counsel of God if we don't teach our people what the Bible says about sex. And I believe this is one of the best books on this subject that ever came out. In this age even if you don't have any problem in this area, you will be counselling people who do. And we need to have answers; And praise God, we do have answers.

Think of the problem of homosexuality, which is worldwide. In San Francisco one of out every five people is homosexual. In other countries it is not as bad, but it is there. Does the Church have any answers to these questions? We have seen what God can do even with people who have that problem. Those of us who are really interested in seeing people come into greater victory need to be disciplined ourselves in all these areas, and we need to have a message.

And then the discipline of details. How easy it is in the work of God to neglect details. We lead a man to Christ without even getting his address. Details are important because people are important, and often the detail is the link with the person. We need disciplined administrators in the Church of God: Men who have a proper notebook system, a proper file system. When we go into their office it doesn't look like somebody has dropped a bomb in the office. When you look into their briefcase it doesn't look like it was attacked by a world of insects who eat paper. I am convinced that Satan often uses little things to slowly drain a man of his spiritual resources before the big attack comes. In some ways all of life is preparation for the big test. Most of us are going to be tested, maybe through a death, maybe through an illness, maybe through some great rejection by our family or by friends. And as we learn to discipline ourselves in these areas, we are going to see greater victory.

7. Criticism

Seventh, deception in this area of criticism, the failure on the part of the Christian leader to learn how to handle criticism. It is just crazy even to go into the ministry if you are not ready for a diet of criticism. Don't overreact to criticism. Learn how God can use it. Often you can learn more from your enemies than you can from your friends, and I believe we can see clearly in the Word of God in many different passages how God uses criticism. Look at 2 Tim. 4:16 "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." Many people misunderstood the Apostle Paul. They turned against him. He forgave them. And if you in your ministry allow a root of bitterness even through someone who criticizes you or misuses you, you are going to drain yourself spiritually and may lose your vitality in God's work. I have seen all over the world in many lives how a root of bitterness can be the enemy's inroad into a man's life. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. Sometimes criticism is just and you can grow. And if it isn't, then the Lord can give you grace.

8. Tangents and Extremes

Then eighth, is the danger of tangents and extremism in false doctrine. This is something that seems to be on the increase, and the Word of God says that in the last times there will be many false Christs. It seems that once a man commits his life to Christ wholly, the next strategy of Satan is to get him on a tangent. Get him into an extreme. Some of you may have read my book called *Revolution Of Love And Balance*. Over the years I've felt more and more burdened to preach about spiritual balance, to warn people about the manipulative methods of the cults. And remember, sometimes it's possible for a good evangelical church to fall into some of these same pitfalls without becoming a false cult. We are seeing this in some of our churches in England and other countries, and as Christian leaders we need spiritual balance. There is not time to go into many of the strategies that Satan is using.

9. Pressing on to the End

Ninth, there is the failure to press on to the end. 1 For 15:58 "Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the works the Lord." There may be someone here today who is discouraged. Maybe you want to quit. I have had constant temptations to quit. I easily get discouraged, and I battle discouragement often every day. But as Christians we have the weapons: the weapons of praise, the weapon of fellowship with others, really sharing with others. I am amazed when I find men of God who are living totally lonely lives, never sharing their problems with anyone else. No wonder their spiritual life get crippled. No wonder they develop some psychosomatic illness or something even worse. We've got to learn to share if we are going to survive in this crazy, mixed-up planet, with all its lostness. Sharing, learning how to survive, is basic for Christian leaders. God gave me some time ago fourteen points on how to survive in the present-day evangelical scene. You will find them in the New Testament.

10. Real Love

And then lastly, failure to cultivate real love. Love is the greatest virtue in the Christian life, and without love we are sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Yes, the Holy Spirit brings love, but at the same time when we are filled with the Spirit we still have much more to learn about how to love different kinds of people. I made a list of fifteen different people that I find hard to love and I asked God to break me and teach me more of Calvary love, because I know without that my ministry is nothing.

I give these things to you, these ten areas of deception, with the prayer that you will go to your New Testament in a fresh way, with a fresh commitment to stand against the fiery darts of Satan and to be God's man or God's woman where you are. And I know that as this takes place, the blessing of God is going to roar across this world at an even greater pace.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word, sharper than a two-edged sword, and we commit our lives to You, that we may not be deceived by these enemy devices, but may stand firm upon Your Word in spiritual reality and in truth. For we pray in Jesus' Name. Amen