

The Soul and Deception

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the pervasive nature of deception in humanity, its origins in the soul, and the necessity of spiritual understanding and the Cross to overcome it.

Scripture: Genesis 3:1, Romans 8:20, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Galatians 2:20, 1 Timothy 4:1, James 3:15, Revelation 12:9, Revelation 20:3, Revelation 20:10

Topics: "Deception", "Spiritual Understanding"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks addresses the pervasive nature of deception in humanity, tracing its roots back to the Fall and emphasizing that enlightenment through civilization and education has only deepened this deception. He explains that man, by nature, is deceived and often unaware of his condition, likening it to a disease that distorts perception and understanding. The sermon highlights the role of the Deceiver, Satan, who exploits the soul's desires and independence from God, leading to a false existence and tragic disillusionment. Sparks warns that reliance on one's own intellect, emotions, or will can open the door to further deception, urging believers to submit to God's authority and the community of the Church to safeguard against these dangers. Ultimately, he emphasizes the necessity of spiritual understanding and the transformative power of the Cross in overcoming deception.

Transcript

One matter upon which the Bible is unmistakably clear throughout is that of man's deception. All God's methods with man have had this fact behind them. With and ever since the Fall the race is regarded as being a deceived race. Not only was the race initially deceived in Adam, but it is ever led on in its deception to deeper depths. Rather than escape from this deception by what is called 'enlightenment', i.e. civilization, education, culture, etc., these are only making the deception stronger. This is seen in the fact that the most 'enlightened' and 'advanced' nations are, at this late hour of the world's history, locked in the grip of a force which compels them to use all their enlightenment for producing the means of mutual destruction on such a scale and by such devilish and barbarous ways as have never been known before. Let us here introduce one or two passages of Scripture.

"Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field... And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said..." (Gen 3:1).

"But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away... giving heed to SEDUCING SPIRITS. and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1).

"This wisdom is not a wisdom that cometh down from above, but is earthly, sensual (soulical), devilish" (James 3:15).

"And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; he was cast down... and his angels... with him" (Rev. 12:9).

"And cast him into the abyss... that he should deceive the nations no more" (Rev 20:3).

"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire..." (Rev 20:10).

In these passages, Satan is seen to be the deceiver, first of the woman and finally of the whole inhabited earth. Deception was his first method, and deception was the very heart of the Fall.

Man is by nature now a deceived creature. Deception is deception, and the deceived never know it until they are enlightened or delivered. It is like a disease. There are forms of mental sickness which cause those who are so suffering to believe certain things which to the healthy mind are ridiculous and impossible. It is useless to argue with them, and futile to try to convince them of the untruth of their beliefs. Indeed, it is cruel at times to oppose them. If you are to live with them in any measure of peace and be at all helpful you have to take the attitude of agreeing with them and deal with the situation along some other line. Otherwise it is going to be continual clash. The only way to change their convictions is to heal their sickness.

So it is with man. He believes many things as to himself, his ability, potentialities, destiny, about God and about the world, which are not true. He mistakes certain things for other things, but he cannot see that he is deceived. It is useless to hold objects before a blind man, and to tell him to see them; and it is foolish to be surprised or annoyed that he does not do so. So the Scriptures say, "The natural (soulical) man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them..." (1 Cor 2:14). And again, "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving" (2 Cor 4:4).

Now, when we go to the source of this deceived condition, we find that it originated in the soul. The Deceiver assailed the soul--desires, reason, will--and drew this out as a basis of life apart from and independent of God. The motive was to have things in the ego, the self, instead of in God by dependence. Having succeeded in getting man to so exalt the ego to independence and superiority, he captured man as now a suited instrument for his purposes. Man ceased to be suited to the purposes of God, for his very nature was changed. This man, changed by complicity with Satan, is a false man, not a true man according to God's mind; and is now suited to Satan's false kingdom. The history of man in his natural state is the history of a lie, a false nature, a false expectation, a false hope, a false faith and a false world. The end of that man and that world is sorry, tragic disillusionment. By the aid of a spirit which, while still existing, is no longer in the place of living fellowship with God, this man faintly glimpses or senses something more of intention and purpose in his being than he can grasp. It eludes him, he cannot come into real touch with it; and so life mocks him, and he seeks satisfaction in other and further deceptions and illusions. Thus he is a part of the creation which the Word of God says is "subjected to vanity" (Rom 8:20). Conscience still is more or less active, but always accusing or excusing, never approving.

As we have said, not only was deception an initial work of the enemy in the soul of man; he presses this advantage, or works on this vantage ground; and whenever he has this ground of nature he seeks to advance his own government and power thereby. As we shall see, the stronger the soul-life in a person,

the greater the peril to that one, and the greater the advantage to Satan and the evil powers. The pursuit of this course is by a multitude of ways, always adapted to the people with whom he has to do. With the ungodly he employs one method; with the religious, who recognize God, another. With the spiritual he resorts to yet other ways, and for them his whole system of deception is by counterfeiting God's system of truth.

He counterfeits God Himself. He "fashioneth himself into an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14). He counterfeits the Church of God with his "synagogue of Satan" (Rev 2:9). He counterfeits the works of God with his "signs and lying wonders" (2 Thess 2:9). There is a counterfeit life, and there are counterfeit "gifts" (as of the Holy Spirit). There is counterfeit Divine (?) power. There are counterfeit conversions, spiritual (?) experiences, guidance. He uses Scriptures in a false way to counter God's meaning by them. There is counterfeit worship of God, counterfeit teaching, "doctrines of demons". There is a counterfeit baptism of the Holy Ghost with "tongues", etc. To those who know the Word of God, all these things are not strange, but are exposed therein.

The point is this. Satan, as the Deceiver, could not bring all that upon man from the outside. Man must first be constituted so that Satan can find in him that which responds to his deception. There must be, for all that, something in man which is the organ to be used. The play of Satan upon the soul of Adam drew that soul out as the ground of procedure. It stretched itself beyond its legitimate measure, and Satan impinged upon it. Thus an alliance came about between man's psuche (soul) and the powers of evil, "deceiving spirits". The object was gained--the ability to know good and evil--and God admitted this. "The man is become as one of us, to know good and evil" (Gen 3:22). But at what a cost! Knowledge in itself is not evil, although it would be well for man if he did not know some things. It is knowledge apart from God that has rendered man a prisoner, a slave, and has cost him that knowledge which is eternal life. "This is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). The cost was a "darkened understanding" (Eph 4:18). The Apostle Paul, who said that "it pleased God... to reveal his Son in me" (Gal 1:15,16), also placed on record that that revelation was intended by the Lord to constitute him an instrument "to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18). As to this, he further said: "God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness... shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

Whenever God in Christ is revealed in the inner man, deception and Satan's power are destroyed, and the man is set free. Against this inshining, Satan works by every conceivable means, ranging from open assault to destroy the messengers, to beautiful substitutes for the truth. But let us return to the principle.

To extend and consolidate his work of deception, and to build his rival and false kingdom, the Deceiver must have ego--soul or self-life. Herein lies the greatness of the peril of believers leaning toward their own self-life, for his occasion against God is greatest in their case. Herein, also, lies the explanation of many other things, as that called 'spiritualism' or 'spiritism' and dictatorship, etc.

Children of God who lean to the soul on any or all of its sides--reason (intellect), emotion (feelings) or will (volition)--will be a ready prey for deception. First of all, such people are already a contradiction of their essential nature as now--by new birth--spiritual. It becomes clear at the outset that they are locked up and a law unto themselves. Their way is the way, and they see no other. As to further light, they are largely unteachable; as to further experience, they are content; as to another course, they cannot conceive of it.

Christians who live in their own mind will often be found occupied with a question. They cannot live without a question or a problem. If one is shattered, they will soon have another. Thus they go ever round in a circle, and come back to their starting point, making no real spiritual progress. Like a horse in the ring, they are whipped and driven, and there is no expanse of life or vision. Or they lash others with their ideas and seek to subject other minds to their own. It may eventuate in some very weird, unsound and untrue conclusions. At length somewhere in this occult position--for it is nothing less--a deception will be found, and Satan's hand will be seen.

The same thing is true with regard to Christians living on the emotional side of the soul. This side demands experiences, evidences, manifestations. Indeed the whole realm of sense-life governs here. If we intensify and project our emotional side sufficiently, we can have any experience that is possible. The whole body and mind can be involved. Vocal cords or solar plexus may be affected. There may be facial distortions, rigidity, 'second sight', visions, extra capabilities, prodigious strength, mirth, ecstasy, etc. All these, from simple beginnings, may come through the psychical or soul-life as extended and strained along the line of intense desire.

If this is true in these two directions, how true it is on the side of the will. A forceful, dominating, assertive soul, not under the government of the Holy Spirit, is a terrible menace to the interests of God. Decisions will be made, courses adopted, objectives secured, positions occupied, in the name of devotion to God, which will be Towers of Babel, Pyramids of Egypt, Ishmaels of Abram (not Abraham). There will be a good deal of remorse bound up with these achievements eventually, and a wish that they had never been. The result will be something false, and many may be involved in the tragedy.

If there is a combination of a strong soul-life with an acute and needle-like brain the supreme peril is that of grasping the deeper implications and meanings of Divine truth, so that it seems to be revelation. Thus, through the soul there is an imitation revelation, which is really only keen natural insight. Usually, when the soul is strong along one line, we shall find it strong in other directions, and so the craving for a sense of power will not be far away. This keen insight, this quick or acute grasp of things, will demand as its complement an opportunity to exhibit itself, and this in its outworking will be to bring others under its influence. The test of genuine revelation is as to whether the one concerned is manifestly well crucified to a desire for power, position, influence. Can that one be resisted, assailed, thwarted, rejected, without in some form seeking to come out even or on top? An element of personal domination or self-vindication will destroy the ministry and discredit the 'revelation' of such an one. Oh, the peril of getting hold of Divine truth in order to use it!

God has laid down every safeguard against this kind of thing in what is truly of Himself. Fellowship, relatedness, interdependence, in the Church which is His Body, are not only privileges or extra factors in a Christian life; they are basic laws for safeguarding Divine interests from the dangers of independence and personal dominance. This is why one who is in a doubtful position is called upon to "hear the church" (Mark 18:17). That means ultimately the surrendering of their own judgment and way to the spiritual judgment of a spiritual church. This in turn--provided the church is walking in the light--is coming under the headship of Christ as head over all things to the church, which is his body (Eph 1:22,23). "Subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ" (Eph 5:21) is something which cuts the ground from under Satan's feet. In keeping with this principle, the Holy Spirit never made an individual the sole overseer of a church. Elders, not an elder, were made in every city and church. God will not have anyone lording it over His heritage. This opens up the whole subject of Divine order which would require too extensive a deviation for our present intention. But let us emphasize that the law of mutual subjection is but the

outworking of that subjection of Christ to His Father which led to the complete nullification and discomfiture of Satan in His own case. All of Satan's temptations of Christ were intended to seduce Him by deception, even to quoting Scripture. If Christ had asserted Himself, instead of referring and deferring to the Father, Satan would have triumphed. What a great deal there is in letting go to God!

What we have said has been mainly on the positive side. The soul can be passive; but this is only another form of soulishness. There is the weak passivity of soul which makes it easy for Satan to just play with those concerned; or which means that, being altogether negative, they count for nothing, and it may be that, sooner or later, he will crush them out of simple trust by producing an inferiority complex. On the other hand, there is that more positive passivity--if we may put those two words together. This is that deliberate rendering of the mind and will negative, so that a mediumistic state is produced. It is not necessary to say what the results of this are in the direction of deception.

When all has been said about the peril of soul-life as such, we have to recognize that the end is death. Injury is done in the mind, in the nerves, in the spiritual life, in the work of God. How necessary, then, it is that the Cross should have done its work in relation to ourselves as well as our past sins! How tremendous a principle is embodied in Paul's words, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I..." (Gal 2:20)!

Strong-mindedness may be thought to be a praiseworthy or excellent thing, but let it be recognized as an infinitely dangerous thing if the one who has it is not a crucified man or woman so far as self is concerned. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt" (Jer 17:9).

Many movements have swept over this earth with the name of Christ attached to them. They claim to be for Him, and multitudes are swept into their nets. There are 'conversions' and experiences. There are supernatural features connected with them. But they are psychical in their foundation. Physical persons with psychical experiences and powers, abnormal and uncanny personal influence, are behind them; and a cult is developed by certain methods being standardized. These methods or soul-tactics are employed to draw out soul-expression in certain forms. It may be a religious form of psychotherapy or psychoanalysis, and it has remarkable effects upon those who respond to it.

The infallible test of all such things is as to what place they give to that fundamental aspect of the Cross of Christ which sets man by nature wholly aside and gives him no place at all--that is, the death of the man, not only the remission of his sins. Try this truth in such movements and they will collapse, and be popular no longer.

It is a matter of very great importance to be able to discriminate between what we have just mentioned and spiritual understanding.

Spiritual Understanding

Paul prayed for saints that they might "be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col 1:9).

Understanding implies a sense or apprehension of the fuller meaning of what is known, with the ability to apply that knowledge to adequate value. It is a matter of intuitive recognition or perception of the hidden nature and trend of things, and differs from the merely outward impression made upon the senses which calls for thought and reasoning. There may be something of this, as we have seen, in people of good and

quick intelligence naturally, but spiritual understanding is something more. It is that faculty of the renewed spirit--an insight, perception, sense, appreciation in relation to Divine matters--which is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the faculty which makes its possessor assured in an inward way of what is of God and what is not so, when very fine questions are at issue and when things are not by any means obvious. This 'discernment' or 'judgment' cannot always at first be explained or given a reason; it is just there, and very real to those who have it. Spiritual understanding is one of the most important things in the equipment of any Christian for responsibility. To put anyone into a position of responsibility in the things of God, or for anyone to take such a position, without this qualification will be to jeopardize the work of God and to put all related thereto into a false and dangerous situation. Something much more than just good 'common sense' and natural judgment is required in things eternal and spiritual. The one pre-eminent object and goal of this spiritual faculty is the knowledge of God, and it does not matter how great and complete may be a man's knowledge otherwise, the one indispensable requirement for responsibility in spiritual work is that he knows God in a measure beyond all natural capability or possibility. No efficiency can substitute for spiritual understanding!

It must be possible for all who are affected by what is said and done to find in the one who speaks and works a personal, living and true knowledge of God, a deep spiritual understanding. It is significant how much people themselves are brought into the limelight by some forms of Christian work; but it is not the Christianity of Romans 6!

Any movement which would make for self-consciousness is missing the way. Self-consciousness, whether it be bad self or good self, big self or little self, is weakness and evil. While all that we write here is necessary, we believe, to enlighten as to a great fact, it is not to turn people in on themselves for self-analysis, introspective occupation. This would be fatal! Christ is our only safe and healthy occupation; and He is the deliverer from ourselves. A basic and crisis thing must have taken place, so that we know by an established law and an inward government when we cross the line from Christ to self in our own souls. A simple, humble and selfless way is safe; so let us not refrain from stepping out on the Lord in conscious weakness, for fear of moving in the soul and not in the spirit.

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