

The Greatest Deception

By: Jim Hohnberger

Can the **truth** be a curse to its possessors, and through their influence a curse to the world? How many people I have met that profess faith in "present truth" and even some who are actively involved in teaching it to others, but upon meeting them, their wives, and their children, I find their lives not in harmony with God! The children are quite often unruly, disobedient, and unmanageable. The wives hold to the forms without the power, and it is not unusual for the husband's conversations to be negative, faultfinding, or to have self-exalting comments mixed with a little jesting and joking.

Friends, do we, as Paul states in Romans 1:18, "hold the truth in unrighteousness?" If the truth we profess to hold does not make us and our families kind, patient, forbearing, heavenly minded, well ordered, well disciplined, compassionate, humble and meek, then we are told "it is a curse to its possessors, and through their influence it is a curse to the world." Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* pg 310.

One of the deepest lessons that those of us professing "present truth" have to learn is that the Word without a living experience in our lives is of little value. The Pharisees are a prime example of holding onto the "words" or "truths" while at the same time denying Christ in their lives. Christ said to them, "Ye search the scrip-

tures: for **in them** ye think ye have eternal life." John 5:39. Is your Christian experience made up of the "theory of truth" while your life and those of your wife and children deny the power thereof? Many of us take for granted that we are Christians, simply because we subscribe to present truth. But if we have not brought the truth, as it is in Jesus, into the practical life of our families, I ask you, What have we? Doesn't the truth as it is in Jesus, always bring conformity of heart and life to the truths held?

Paul said it well in Romans 2:21, "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?" It is when we learn to live "the life hid with Christ in God" (see Colossians 3:3) that we will "finish the work." A mere sermonizing and profession of present truth will never do it. Friends, have we taught others and not taught ourselves and our own families? It is still true that one well-ordered, well-disciplined family tells more in behalf of Christianity than all the sermons that can be preached. People all over are saying, "Enough sermonizing, enough preaching; we want to see 'lives hid with Christ in God,'" whole families, fathers, mothers and children living the truth they espouse, whole families walking with God, whole families transformed, not in profession

only, but also in practical day-to-day life.

We have been wisely warned that "The **greatest** deception of the human mind in Christ's day was that a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness. In all human experience a **theoretical knowledge** of the truth ... often accompanies a hatred of genuine truth as made manifest in life ... The Pharisees claimed to be children of Abraham, and boasted of their possessions of the oracles of God: yet these advantages did not preserve them from selfishness, malignity, greed for gain, and the basest hypocrisy. They **thought** themselves the greatest religionists of the world, but their so-called orthodoxy led them to crucify the Lord of glory. The same danger still exists." *The Desire of Ages* 309.

Friends, the same danger still exists today. Do we have an assent to the truth without the hour-by-hour application of it in our life and our families' lives?

Do we have a "perfect" theoretical knowledge of "present truth" without a life and family that are held moment by moment from exhibiting the weaknesses of our fallen natures?

Do we boast of our possession of the oracles of God, while in our life and that of our wife and children are seen selfishness, disorder, unruliness, irritation and self-sufficiency?

Do we think of ourselves as the greatest religionists of the day, yet at the same time crucify the Lord of glory afresh by our giving way to irritation, sarcasm, a jesting spirit, a critical faultfinding mouth, and tolerating an unruly household? If so, then we are in grave danger of entering into the greatest deception that can come upon God's people. That is professing we are all right, while in life we are all wrong.

It is time we start living our faith. And if we cannot bring the "life hid with Christ in God" into our families, then we cannot bring it abroad either, for we can give to others only what we ourselves possess. Our influence will retard the work. It is not that we cannot live the "life hid with Christ in God," it is that we choose not to.

Let us demonstrate to others that this "life hid with Christ in God" is a "present reality," a "present experience" here and now. Let us put our homes in order and lead the remnant into the promised life, lest the truth becomes a curse to us and through our influence a curse to the world.

The apostle Paul said it well in 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, "And my speech and my preaching was

not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in **demonstration** of the Spirit and the power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." It is not our correct understanding or profession of present truth that will finish the work, but rather the **demonstration** of it in our lives and families, for it is then that it becomes a living demonstration of practical power upon our lives. Is it not true that the actions of our families and our own lives speak louder than the most positive profession of our truths? How grieved we all would have been had we gone home with the

apostle Paul and not found his life in harmony with his preaching and teachings! How disheartening and discouraging it would have been to visit in the home of Enoch and have found his family unruly, disorderly and undisciplined! How empty, how fruitless would their testimony have been!

There are many of us present-truth Christians who wonder why we fail; but think of the ease with which we talk and join in frivolous, unnecessary conversations, spending hours and never thinking that all our conversation may be dissipating the soul's power and leading us away

from the indwelling Christ. What influence does our conversation have on our children? What influence does our conversation have on those about us? James 1:26 clearly states, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." Should not the rule of our conversations be as the apostle Paul has well stated, "For I determine not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified?" 1 Corinthians 2:2.

Friends, have you learned to live your life knowing God is with you in reality every moment? That in the most difficult circumstances He is always more present and nearer than anyone or anything around you? All our knowledge of God's Word will help us very little unless that question is answered and implemented in our lives. One might be able to present the letter of the Word of God; he might be familiar with all its commands and promises, but unless his life is truly "hid with Christ in God," in constant dependence upon Him, all his knowledge and profession will be of no avail. Many, so many, are failing in their lives of imitating our holy Pattern because they are full of their own thoughts, their own words, their own plans, always active,

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always busy; but they seem not to have time or place for the precious Jesus to be a close, dear and present Companion to them. They do not refer every thought, word, action and plan to Him, inquiring, "Is this the way of the Lord?"

Friends, let us not break with the "present truth" we all hold dear and precious, but let us add to it a full and complete surrender of ourselves and our families. Let us all possess a living experience of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27. Should not we all say, Enough of present truth without the application? Enough of profession without the power. Enough of knowledge without an active present-day living experience, lest we be guilty of living the greatest deception, and in the end receive not the seal of God in our foreheads.

How terribly grieved I would be if after having ministered to scores and scores of individuals and families, as well as having conducted seminars and cottage meetings in and across this nation, should I be found unfit for the seal of God! And how saddened I would be if many of my friends and co-laborers in bringing present truth to this world should also be found unfit for the seal of God! Perhaps even worse would be for me and my friends and co-laborers to receive the seal of God while those of our loved ones are passed by.

In the same way that the truth can be a curse to its possessors, so also can the church be a curse to its adherents and through their influence a curse to the world. Just the thought of the truth or the church being a curse is enough to raise one's ire, but we must be nakedly honest with ourselves lest we be deceived in these troublous times.

"Christ's act in cursing the (fig) tree which His own power had created stands as a warning to all churches and to all Christians." *The Desire of Ages* 584. Why did Christ curse the fig tree, which represented the Jewish nation, the chosen people of God? Because Jesus found nothing in it but a mass of pretentious foliage. Or as the apostle Paul said, "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." 2 Timothy 3:5. The tree drew people to itself with a hope of receiving life, but it had no life to give, only pretentious leaves. When any church draws followers to itself rather than pointing them to Christ, not in theory but in practice, it usurps the place of Christ and in turn becomes a curse rather than an instrument of grace.

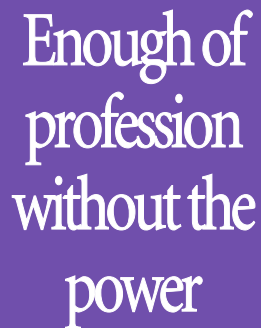
Let me illustrate. When a man is giving an illustrated lecture, he often uses a long pointer to direct his audience's attention to a specific area on a chart, drawing or blackboard. Do the people look at the pointer? No, the pointer is only to help direct their attention to the specific area of interest on the chart or drawing. The pointer may be of fine mahogany with inlaid gold, but the pointer cannot satisfy the people. They want to see what the pointer directs them to. The church is nothing more than a pointer, pointing us to our Saviour. It is the tool of God to take the three angels' messages to the world, as well as to demonstrate to all men, women and children how to live the "life hid with Christ in God." See Colossians 3:3.

When a church draws people to itself and the "focus" becomes the support of the system, the allegiance to the system, the connection with the system and an elevation of the system, it is then that it can become a curse. There is no system or church that has ever saved a man. The Jews based their hope of salvation on the fact of their connection with Israel. But Jesus says, "I am the real Vine. Think not that through a connection with Israel you may become partakers of

the life of God, and inheritors of His promise. Through **Me alone** is spiritual life received."

The very system that Christ raised up, that was to point the people to the coming of the promised Messiah, was the very system that stole the allegiance of its adherents from the Messiah in order to lift itself up and to insure its own welfare. How very sad that the very One the church was to point all men to, it crucified! This same danger still exists today. Everywhere we hear the cry, Support the system; be faithful to the system; don't leave the system.

But we need to ask ourselves, Where are the voices of concern for whether we are abiding in Christ, whether we have a living daily experience in Christ? Where are the concerns as to whether our families are well ordered, well disciplined, and Christ-centered? Where are those upholding us to remain with Christ in our thoughts, in our words and in our actions? We hear little or none of this. But we hear a great deal of whether we are supporting, attending and are in good standing with the system. But if that system steals the place of Christ, as the Jewish system did, then it is in jeopardy of becoming a curse to its adherents and through



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their influence a curse to the world. Christ says, "I am the Vine" and only as we are day by day, moment by moment connected to Him do we have life and salvation.

My plea to you is not to abandon the system but to so attach yourself to the Leader of the system, that through you He can awaken and revive His "pointer." Let us not utter one word of cursing against the system, but let us rather cry over the sins found in her as Christ did over Jerusalem. We cannot and must not throw out the church, no more that we would throw out the truth. Now we need to give each of them its rightful place, as a "pointer," to help direct us to a vital and intimate connection with our only source of salvation, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

Friends, examine **your own** hearts, judge your own course. Let each put the question to his own life: "Have I held to a system more than to Christ Himself? Have I trusted in my knowledge of the truth, more than a living experience in it?"

Then covenant with me to give **all** to Christ - all your allegiance, all your thoughts, all your words, all your actions. The true gospel can be found only when we give all - all we have, all we are, all we can be. God, the great I AM, withheld nothing from us. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." John 3:16. "He gave Him not only to bear our sins, and to die as our sacrifice; He gave Him to the fallen race. To assure us of His immutable counsel of peace, God gave His only begotten Son to become one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature." Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pg. 25.

Calvary demonstrates that God withheld **nothing**, He gave all. The cross of Calvary is love's unanswerable argument of giving all. I ask you what more could God have given? What more could God have done? God sacrificed all He had for our redemption, that we might enter into this "life hid with Christ in God." God gave all that we might have all.

Will you not covenant with me to give all to Christ? Covenant never to start a day unless you can say with David, My "heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." Psalm 112:7. Never get off your knees unless you know that Christ is now by your side as your constant daily Companion.

Will you not covenant with me to refer every thought, word, and action to Christ, inquiring: "Is this the way of the Lord?" Will you not educate your mind and heart to ever feel the presence of God, and when in trial and perplexity allow your prayers to ascend to God saying,

"What shall I do to honor thee, my God?"

I pray that God will open our eyes to see that we are not God's children unless we are such entirely. We cannot just be Christ's in profession; no, we are not His unless we are His **entirely**. All—and I mean **all** our thoughts, words and actions—are to be consciously and continually filtered through our Mediator before they find expression. Is this your experience? If it is not, it can be. Will you choose it? If you will not, then will you succumb to the "**greatest deception**," which is having a knowledge, a profession to the truth and an allegiance to the church, while your life, your thoughts, your words, and your actions are not every day, every moment "hid with Christ in God?"

This life of absolute dependence, absolute trust, absolute surrender is available to us all today. Now! Friends, we have heretofore lived a life to our own liking. Will you not begin today, by the grace of Heaven, to live a life fully and completely given to the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Will you not now choose a life in which Christ shall be All and in All.

Power for Living



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