



The Good News

October 29th, 2017

Volume 17, Issue 44

The Danger of Deceiving Ourselves

By Michael McCleary

I knew someone many years ago before I was in high school, who was struggling spiritually without realizing it. They went to church and tried to do everything that was expected of them. At school, they tried to be the best example they could be. Yet, despite the apparent “religious” life they led, they were not being righteous, though they thought they were. They rarely prayed and rarely studied their Bible. When they were at church service, they said they were dozing off or daydreaming. Some may say, “Well that’s nothing compared to what I did when I was young.” This is not an issue of how righteous we were (or weren’t) then or are now; it is an issue of how righteous we think we are. This person was deceiving themselves for so long because they thought they were being righteous. They thought that as long as they did the obvious things, they were doing what God wanted. But God knew that, despite their claim to be righteous, their heart did not mirror it. Hear Paul in **Gal. 6:3**, “*For if a man thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*” They thought they were being righteous, yet they were not and were deceiving themselves.

This is a danger that we all face, whether young or old. It can be easy to convince ourselves that we are righteous and acceptable to God while it may be in reality we are not. Think of the church at Ephesus when Jesus addressed them in **Rev. 2:1-7**. After reading verses 1-3 you would think you were reading about one of the strongest and most righteous churches there could be. Yet Jesus says in verse 4 that they had left their first love. For all the righteous deeds they were doing, it was all for naught because they were doing the deeds with the wrong heart and wrong love. Again, in **Rev. 3:14-21**, we read of the church at Laodicea that believed they had become “self-sufficient” and had forsaken God in their hearts. Jesus, in verse 16, calls them “lukewarm”, not hot, and not cold...they were just **there**. He would tell them in verse 17, “*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of*

nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Jesus essentially tells them that they were deceiving themselves because they did not realize that while they may have had physical blessings, they were lacking spiritually.

As Jesus was speaking to the Jews, He says, “*Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*” (**Matt. 23:25,26**) We must look intently and fervently at what the Bible says regarding what kind of heart and mind we are to have as Christians, realizing that appearing righteous does not make us so. Just as the Jews went through the motions and made the sacrifices, God would say, “*Forasmuch as this people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.*” (**Is. 29:13**) All these deceived themselves into thinking they were acceptable to God, yet we see there is more that God requires of us than just appearing righteous...we must truly be righteous.

Well, how can I be righteous? I must live by faith (**Rom. 1:17**), knowing that faith = belief + obedience. I must work and labor with the Gospel in the vineyard of the Lord to grow my own character in Him (**II Pet. 2:5-8**) as well as try to teach others to grow theirs (**I Tim. 4:16**). And above all, I must be honest with myself regarding how I am aligning (or not aligning) with what God commands of me in His Word (**II Cor. 13:5**). This requires me to know God’s Word and apply it accurately (**II Tim. 2:15**).

As we worship our God this Lord’s Day, let’s be aware of this danger, making changes if necessary, so that we can truly be servants to Him, not deceiving ourselves.