

Ichabod

by Roger Oakland

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The Bible calls Satan the great deceiver. To be deceived means to be led away from the truth without knowing it. If the person being deceived knew they were being deceived, then deception would not have occurred. One must believe that one is not deceived in order to be deceived. It is just that simple.

I believe that understanding deception has a lot to do with having a proper perspective. Instead of having God's perspective, the person being deceived has his own perspective. A human desire for power and the potential to be proud are two of the greatest barriers that prevent us from seeing God's perspective. Satan's plan is to deceive mankind by working on human weaknesses. He knows what he is doing.

In *Proverbs* we read: *"There is a way that seemeth right unto man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."* Think about this for a moment. The Bible states *"the wages of sin is death."* So what may seem right, can lead to death because the consequence of sin is death. Do you see how deception works?

Sometimes it is beneficial to take time to do a reality check on our lives. For example, a Christian can be confident that he or she is serving the Lord when he is actually deceived. This is because what we do *"seems to be right"* in our eyes.

Not long ago a situation occurred which helped me to see how easily one can be deceived by not having the proper perspective. I was looking over a series of slides on my digital camera. I had taken these photos while traveling around England. Without knowing what I had done I had somehow expanded the view on one particular slide from the normal view to a view that was 10 times enlarged. As I was flipping through the slides, I could not figure out what the scene was that I had photographed.

Moving the picture around on the screen from left to right and top to bottom did not help. It was the most frustrating experience. Nothing that I could see in the photo seemed to give me a clue where I had taken this photo. Suddenly, I remembered how to view the slide in the normal unexpanded view. In a second I could see what the picture was and recalled exactly where I had taken it. I just needed the proper perspective.

Perhaps this illustration will be useful to help you see what can happen to human beings, ministries, pastors and even denominations. It is very easy to go about our lives thinking we are God's chosen vessel, doing His will, when we are deceived and doing the work of Satan. This is why it is important that we read the Word and give ourselves a reality check from time to time.

When the Glory Has Departed

I know Christian leaders and denominations that started out right but have ended up wrong. This downfall can be predicted in light of church history. God has raised up individuals from time to time to be leaders. As long as these leaders are led by the Holy Spirit and continue in His Word, God's blessings will be abundant. Sometimes, a pastor will become a leader and a model for many other pastors. Eventually, a fellowship of churches with like-minded pastors may be the result.

This fellowship of pastors teaches the Word of God and the sheep are enlightened and fed. The sheep, because they are learning, love God with all their heart. This love spreads to the horizontal plane and love is overflowing. The sheep want to tell others about Jesus. It is even possible to have a Jesus movement.

However, the passing of time has a way of helping us forget. Perhaps another way of saying this is that Satan hates what God is doing. It doesn't take long before the fellowship of pastors takes on a different perspective. Some pastors forget from where they came. They were once shepherds with small flocks. As they taught the Word and fed the sheep, the small flocks grew to become mega-churches.

These mega-churches grew to the point that there was no longer a flock, there was a herd. There were so many sheep in the flock that the shepherd had no choice but to manage the flock by turning the church into a corporation.

As everyone knows, churches, when they become corporations have to operate like a corporation not a church. In the world, people in corporations are always looking for position. The only way one can be successful in climbing the corporate ladder is to be loyal to the corporation and the corporate president.

Here lies a problem—when a Christian becomes more loyal to a man than to the Son of Man, spirituality can soon turn into carnality. Carnality that is further driven by the obsession for power, position and possession often is the perfect recipe for disaster. What once was a wonderful Spirit-filled church now becomes a machine that simply goes through the motions. Everything looks like it is working. However, the machine is broken.

When the Spirit Departs

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit inspired the writer of I Samuel to give us an example of what happened to the children of Israel in days past.

Israel, as a nation, knew the glory of God's presence among them. The children of Israel prospered and became strong as they followed the Lord. However, Israel turned from God by

making wrong choices. Eventually, they came to the place where the presence of God was no longer among them. The glory of God had departed.

In a desperate attempt to win a battle with the Philistine army, Israel devised a plan. The leaders actually believed that if they took the ark of the covenant with them to battle that God was obligated to lead them to victory.

Such was not the case. God did not fight for Israel. Israel was defeated and the Philistines triumphed and even took the ark. When a messenger returned from the battlefield with the sad news that the army was defeated, the ark captured, and the two sons of Eli were dead, Eli fell backward off his chair, broke his neck and died.

Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of one of the sons killed in battle was pregnant. When she heard the news that her husband, brother-in-law and father-in-law were dead she went into labor. She gave birth to a son, but she died during the delivery. The Bible states that the woman who was acting as the midwife named the son—Ichabod. "*Ichabod*" means the glory has departed.¹

There are other examples in Scripture of what happens when the Spirit of God departs from a man. For example in *1 Samuel 16: 14* we read, "*But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.*" Or, remember the story of Samson. Once empowered by the Spirit there came a time when the LORD departed from him and Samson was not even aware that it happened.²

A Biblical Solution

The Bible paints a grim scenario with regard to what happens when the Spirit of God departs, doesn't it? Well, I have some good news. There is a solution.

I believe that such a scenario could be turned around. God wants His servants to finish the race. He does not take joy in seeing them defeated. Do you recall the words of Jesus when He spoke to the church at Ephesus as recorded in *Revelation 2*?³ While the members of the church were noted for saying what was right, in their zeal to be right, they were wrong. In fact it almost seems as if the Spirit of God had departed from their midst

This can be deduced by reading what Jesus said. He was warning that He would depart from their midst. Jesus said that the church at Ephesus had "left their first love" and that they needed to "*repent*" and "*return to the place*" where they had once been. That means they had departed and did not know it.

Jesus said He would remove the "*candlestick*" if they did not repent. Clearly Scripture interprets this to mean that Jesus would remove His presence from the church of Ephesus. Did that mean He was about to write "*Ichabod*" above the door of the church?

The Spirit of God points us to the Word. The Word, Jesus said, is the truth. What we do with the truth is entirely up to us. We can choose to obey or to disobey.

I would pray that every Christian would sincerely ask God for His perspective of where we are and what we are doing. Don't rely upon the praises of man or the fear of man as a spiritual barometer.

When we stand before the throne all the things we did in the flesh will burn like wood and hay. Only those things that were done when we were led by the Spirit will count.

It is all about getting the right perspective, now.

Before it is too late.

Posted by FindingTheChurch.com

¹ *1 Samuel 4:1-21*

² *Judges 16:20*

³ *Revelation 2:1-7*