

7. Acts 13 — Following Deception Trails

In Acts 13, “God-fearing” women were influenced to join the wrong cause. What steps do you take to protect yourself from being influenced in a manner that does not strengthen the cause of Christ? Jesus warned us about this in Mark 13. Though He is speaking about the prophetic future, Jesus stresses that a disciple’s greatest danger is not war, not calamity, not persecution or betrayal. It is **deception**.

Truths we can know about the future:

- Jesus said conditions on this planet are not going to get better but worse! We can forget the idea of world peace until He comes back. (Mark 13:7-8)
- Persecutions and betrayals will affect Christians until Jesus returns. He’ll give us strength to endure them plus words to say, and we are not to be afraid. (Mark 13:9-13)
- This great time of worldwide, massive tribulation hasn’t happened yet. The destruction of Jerusalem was not the worst that had happened before or even since that time. It is still to come. (Mark 13:14-23)
- Jesus is physically coming back to planet earth, and no one is going to miss it. Isn’t that good news? We just don’t know when. (Mark 13:24-27)
- Jesus is leaving His disciples behind with certain responsibilities. To them and to all of us, He says, “Stay alert.” (Mark 13:33-37)

Watch Out That No One Deceives You—Mark 13:5

Deception affects the direction our minds are going—and our bodies follow. Our Bible is like a map, and the Holy Spirit is our compass, always orienting us to Jesus and His way. Without relying on our map and compass, we are vulnerable to being deceived. At least 33 New Testament verses warn believers about being deceived or led astray. Deceiving us is one of Satan’s best means for making us ineffective at pursuing Christ completely. We put all our energy going in the wrong directions.

“But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:3)

Deception trails are anything that wastes our time, energy and money by sending us in a direction away from our responsibilities as Jesus’ disciple: 1) knowing Christ and following Him only, and 2) being His witnesses as we let Him live His life through us.

Deception Trail #1: Ignore the Map and Compass and Go by How You Feel

The Deception:

- I feel like some of my sins are not forgivable.
- I feel I am not good enough for God to love. Or else He wouldn’t let bad things happen to me.
- I feel like I have to still earn His approval by working harder or being better.
- If it feels right, it must be right.

Relying on how we feel about something rather than on the Bible and the Holy Spirit to guide us makes us vulnerable to being deceived.

God’s Truth:

- You feel like some of your sins are not forgivable. Colossians 2:13-14 says that God forgives us completely when we trust in Jesus Christ. All of our sins were future at that time.

- You are unsure that God can love you. Romans 8:38-39 says that God's love is unconditional, regardless of our imperfections, because we belong to Him through our faith in Jesus.
- Take any other emotion that seems to be running your life—fear, worry, anger, or impatience. Trust the Holy Spirit to help you find a scripture that teaches truth. Repeat it to yourself, believing it. Let your emotions respond to God's Word. They'll line up eventually.

Deception Trail #2: Great Gear And A Great Body Make For A Great Hike.

The Deception:

- Getting selfish will make us better and happier—having better gear (such as a nicer home, newer car, stylish clothes) or a better body (slim, wrinkle free, big boobs), we will be happier. Pleasing our physical senses is the priority in our lives to make us strong enough to get through life.

The Truth:

- Having a great body and great stuff does not guarantee endurance through trouble. Denying oneself and following Jesus does. If we truly believe that knowing Christ and following Him, being His witness in our world, is our priority, it would show in how we spend our time, energy and resources. We can ask Jesus to help us prioritize our lives because He understands.

“Then, we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” (Ephesians 4:14)

Deception Trail #3: Assume All Signposts Are Accurate

The Deception:

There are some cultural signposts that are misleading, maybe even rotten at the bottom. They keep us from being effective at following Jesus (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Example:

- Women are superior to men.
- Children don't need fathers because women are sufficient in themselves.
- Men can't be trusted because they are imbeciles.
- “Let's make God female” or worship the goddess within

The Truth:

Don't let other peoples' thoughts be a replacement for the Bible. (Colossians 2:8) Always compare what people are telling you with what is in the Scriptures. (Acts 17:11)

As believers, we need to stay within sight and sound of Jesus' voice, which are the Bible and the Holy Spirit within us. When we don't, we make ourselves vulnerable to following a deception trail. So...rely on the map and compass to follow signposts that also rely on the map and compass!

The Challenge

What changes do you need to make today to keep you alert to deceptions and to rely on your map and compass so that you can hike Jesus' trail **effectively**?