



Understanding Deception

by Ronald L. Dart

Consider a strange irony: Almost every religious deception known to man has been introduced by warning its audience *against deception*. I have seen a lot of strange religious ideas in my time, and most of them cite somewhere in the text Revelation 12, verse 9, which identifies the arch-deceiver as:

Revelation 12

AKJV

⁹ [...] that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world[....]

Now, the premise is that, *you*, brother, have been deceived; and I am here to ease your pain, to rescue you from deception, to lead you into the light. The problem is, the old Arch-Deceiver himself almost certainly would show up on my doorstep with exactly the same message. “I am here to enlighten you, my brother.”

Now, I’ve been watching various forms of deception abroad in the world for *many* years now, and I’ve come to certain conclusions about deception which I am prepared to share with you. I don’t mean to hurt anyone’s feelings, but deception is practiced so diligently by *so many people*—accidentally and on purpose—that I am bound to step on someone’s toes. If so, I’m sorry; but “no pain, no gain” applies here, as well. One other caveat: As I explain this, I will be using a combination of Scripture, human reason, and experience. The reason for using Scripture is obvious; I shouldn’t have to explain that. The reason for using *human* reason is that, being human, it’s the only kind of reasoning I’ve got to work with. God created the human mind in his own image (along with everything else about man) and gave us the power to *reason* so that we would come to know and communicate with him with the same reasoning structure. Human reason is a divine creation just like the human eye, so don’t knock it. The reason for using *experience* is it’s a lot less painful and expensive for you to learn from *my* experience. But that’s up to you. I’ve been here 76 years and have bought my share of used cars.

By the way, while this program is about religious deception, it’s essentially the same game in politics and *every other field of human activity*—even, regrettably, in family relationships. So what I’ve learned about deception may be of value across a *broad* range of human experience.

Now, much to my surprise, when I began to think about it, it resolved itself into a series of principles; and that’s what we’re going to talk about. For example...

Number 1: Deception is like a virus. Just like the flu, a lot of people who spread deception don’t mean to. Satan himself doesn’t have to *do* a lot of deception; all he has to do is introduce it to a willing mind and then sit back and watch it spread, like a virus. Deception is like a virus in that it makes a lot of people sick, and like AIDS they are sometimes sick a long time before they know it. They end up hurting and confusing a lot of people without meaning to. I call them “accidental carriers”...and so was Typhoid Mary an accidental carrier. My scripture for this subject? Well, it comes from James, who knew Jesus well:

- ¹ Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.
- ² We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

So really, be *careful* about spreading your knowledge around until it has been tested. *You* might be a carrier. Here's how you can practice this: When you get any email with astounding information in it (especially with the little three letters FWD, which means "forward", in front of it) just delete it. If you absolutely have to consider... it's so exciting, so thrilling, you *have to* send it on to somebody, cross-check it. The way you do this (it's easy, it's like falling off a log), you take a phrase—in quotes, a fairly meaningful phrase—from the email and then you paste it up in your search engine with quotes around it. Then you take a quick look at the references that come up. It won't take long; and it will save your friends some time, unnecessary worry, and will keep you from being an innocent carrier of deception. Because the odds are you're going to find two or three websites up there telling you that this thing that you just got that's so exciting is a *fraud*. And you probably already know this. And if you don't know how to do it, well, just rent a kid from one of your neighbors. The kids all know all this stuff, and they know *precisely* how to deal with it. But one of the biggest and best examples of the viral effect of deception is mailing stuff around as though it were true when *you haven't checked it out*. Just delete it.

Number 2: Deception is confusing. Now, when you think about this for a minute, you know it has to be; because *clarity* and *simplicity* are the mortal enemies of deception. You may want to write that down: Clarity and simplicity are the mortal enemies of deception. So deception likes complicated arguments; and in religion long, convoluted doctrinal papers. One fellow gave me a book he'd written to explain this doctrinal nuance, which didn't amount to... something that could have been covered in two pages. He had written a book the size of the Tyler telephone directory.

Now, experience says that the more pages it takes to explain an idea, the more likely it is to be wrong. Direct proportion—the length of the paper, the more likely it's in error and full of... well, never mind. This level of experience has been around since the 1300s, when a man named William of Ockham opined that, when all has been weighed, the simplest solution is usually the correct one. It's called Occam's Razor (I suppose because it cuts things down to the bone). What's my scripture on this one? Well, it was Paul, writing to the Corinthians—his second letter to these obstreperous people. He said:

2 Corinthians 11

AKJV

- ³ But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Easy, isn't it? I bet you could have thought of that one yourself. But the *subtlety*, the *slipperiness*, the *confusion* of things... this is important to anyone practicing deception.

Number 3: Deception is a swindler. It's an old axiom: "You can't cheat an honest man." For the swindle to work, it has to appeal to some desire you have that you probably shouldn't have. A man, for example, who wants a divorce (so he can take off with his young, new cutie he's found) is a sitting duck for a long, involved explanation of why it is okay to walk away from his wife, his children, and his responsibilities, and he doesn't have to stay there because of some religious idea about divorce and remarriage. In religion, he will quickly accept a paper on divorce and remarriage that makes it okay. Not only that, he will then become a *missionary* for the new idea; he'll become a *carrier*. This is how *a lot* of people become carriers. They feel the need to justify a life decision, and the more people they convince the more secure they are in their belief and their decision. But you should know this about carriers: the longer and louder they preach their pet idea, the more *insecure* they are about it. Keep it in

mind: Deception has to be maintained; otherwise it will dissolve into painful truth. You run into people who are *pathological* in their advocacy of this special doctrine or idea. Truth is, they are people who are deathly afraid they might be wrong. They don't want to hear any other argument. They're fighting so hard for this. They're fighting every reason in the world to justify what it is they're doing. And all the time they're deceiving themselves first.

Number 4: Deception goes around in circles. Now, it *has to*, because one of the objects of deception is to *prevent progress*. If you make progress, even in the wrong direction, you will wake up some day and realize, "Hey, I didn't want to go here." And at that point the deception is defeated; because you can repent and go where you were supposed to go in the first place, right? So if you're making probably you're better off making progress in the wrong direction than you are going around in circles. Now, that's why so many theological arguments plow the same ground over and over again; it is *busywork*—like digging a hole and filling it up again. Don't you have *better* things to do? Well, deception thinks *this* is better .

Number 5: Deception fights for survival. It will do whatever it has to do to keep from being defeated. Now, this is one of the more important things you need to understand. It will manufacture sources, it will spin truth so it appears to be falsehood, it will selectively include and then delete information, it will lie. *It has to*; because once found out, it's dead. Probably the clearest example of this behavior—where you can actually see it night by night and just evaluate it and watch—the clearest example of this behavior is in politics. It's demonstrated every night by talking heads on TV. They call it "spin". I call it deception. Better yet, call it a *lie*. You have... God gave you an internal lie detector. Tune it up, pay attention, call deception what it is. Call a lie what it is: a lie. You will feel better almost immediately, and the clouds will clear and understanding will return. Deception is going to try to stay alive; in spite of this, it's a battle.

Number 6: Deception is fond of unprovable assertions. Now, this should go without saying; because if you can prove it the deception is over. Suppose, for example, a person wants to undermine the credibility of an opponent. Deception can spread the rumor that this man is a practicing Mason (assuming that the audience cares about that). Now, if a man is a Mason, he could easily prove it. He could say, "Here's the paperwork. I'm a Mason." How do you prove you're *not* one? That's quite a trick. How can you prove you're not a Mason. Deception *loves* this kind of allegation. It's the meat and potatoes of every conspiracy theory. Closely allied to this is asking unanswerable questions and creating suspicion that all is not as it seems to be. Conspiracy theorists are not fond of facts. They prefer questions and *unprovable* assertions. That's something you need to listen carefully for when people are talking: Where are the facts? How would you go about proving what he just said, or is he asking you to prove a negative like, "He's a Mason!" How do you prove he's not?

Number 7: Deception imputes motives. Deception is fond of the *ad hominem* attack and will *actively* discredit *anyone* who has the nerve to point out that the king isn't wearing any clothes (the old adage). It actually really doesn't matter if a man is a Jesuit spy involving himself in some Christian organization *if his research checks out*. Search the Scriptures daily to see if these things are so. This is the example from the Bible [Acts 17:11] Just because a theologian is a Protestant, a Catholic, or wears *pink underwear* does not mean his *research* is flawed. You've got to look at it, read it carefully, check the footnotes, look them up, and then you'll know. You won't know it because somebody *says*, "Oh, well he's just a Jesuit." My scripture on this one comes from Jesus himself; it's Matthew 7, verse 15. He said:

Matthew 7

AKJV

¹⁵ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Well, how do you know? Jesus said:

Matthew 7

AKJV

¹⁶ You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

¹⁷ Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit.

“Well, how can you tell the difference?”, I’ve heard people ask. Well, you know, Jesus is assuming you’ve got some brains. He’s assuming he can’t have to tell you *everything*. He said:

Matthew 7

AKJV

¹⁸ A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

¹⁹ Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

²⁰ Why by their fruits you shall know them.

So realize that whenever these people come along imputing motives to other people and saying, “Well he’s this or that”, let’s talk about the person’s *fruits*, not what somebody says that can’t be proved.

Number 8: Deception projects its image onto others. Whenever someone accuses someone or something of deception, the chances are they themselves are deceivers—accidental or intentional. (It takes one to know one.) Now, I’m not going to tell you who the deceivers are; you’ve got to learn to spot them for yourself. And, yes, I realize that applies to me. Perhaps you’ve noticed I am not naming names. It is *deception* I am accusing, not people. And you should listen to what I have to say and evaluate it on the same basis of putting the rest of this stuff out. Okay?

Number 9: In religion, deception loves to quote Scripture. Now, any deceiver who cannot find some scriptures that say what he wants them to say isn’t worth his salt. The more Scripture the better! When I see a long list of scriptures in an argument... people send me doctrinal papers all the time; and I’ve seen them make a statement, then they’ll list about fifteen scriptures after it. I *ignore* it. To me, that’s a sign of someone who has *nothing to say*. Don’t tell me to look in the Bible; I look in the Bible *all the time*. I look in there every day of my life. People who take proof texts out of context and string them together to make their point are *immediate* suspects. I prefer to read my Bible *in the leather*, as I say—in context—and I suggest you do the same... a lot.

Number 10: Deception is condescending. Any time you’re talking to somebody who makes you feel *inferior*—in spirituality or attitude or holiness or practice—you are probably, almost certainly, talking to a deceiver; not a first-line deceiver, though, a carrier—one who has been deceived, who thinks he knows more than he does, and sets out to spread the virus. A first-line deceiver is too smooth to be condescending; he wants you to feel *good* about yourself. A first-line deceiver is often a flatterer. Only the second-string carrier is condescending. It is a dead giveaway when they tell you that *you* are deceived. You could say, “Well, I may be; but not by you.”

Number 11: Deception loves to preach and pontificate. Deception is very fond of soapboxes. This is also typical of the carrier—not the first-line deceiver; the first-line deceiver is more subtle. He lets his carriers do the preaching. I once encountered an atheist on a soapbox on Hyde Park Corner in London; and I listened to him for a little while and I began to realize: What in the world is he doing up here? Why is he wasting his time like this? If he doesn’t believe in God, why is he spending so much time *talking about him*? Anyway...

Number 12: Deception is common. It is not rare. It is not “somewhere else”; you run into it *every day*. Entertain yourself by watching for it. This is one of the keys to the whole thing: you’ve got to start *watching* for deception. Out buying a used car? Watch for it. Hang labels on it for easy identification. Deception *hates* labels because they indicate it has been *found out*. Now don’t label people; just label deception.

I was thrilled when I discovered something and I named it “Radical Anti-Paganism”. (I shortened it up to RAP.) Someone was critical because they thought I was labeling people when I did that. Not so. I was naming an *-ism*. Radical Anti-Paganism (RAP) is roughly a belief that anything pagans ever did is wrong. So you can say, if that’s pagan... well, you can condemn somebody by it. I don’t want to know that. For all I know, the pagans *invented breakfast*; and I’m not ready to give that up.

Number 13: With the possible exception of the Arch-Deceiver, all deceivers deceive themselves first; and, being deceived, they don’t *know* they are deceived. They are *sincere*. And that, too, makes sense. When you catch yourself acknowledging that a man is sincere, you are probably thinking he’s sincerely wrong. With sincerity and a dollar bill, you can buy a cup of coffee some places (but you won’t get any change). Be sure you’re *right*, not just sincere, before going off half-cocked. All carriers are sincere. Only the first-line deceivers are truly evil; they couldn’t care less. You’ll have to use your own judgement as to how safe it is to be with carriers. They say there is no risk in hugging an AIDS sufferer, but that may not be true of some other viruses.

Number 14: It is really hard to challenge deception. The carrier of deception often has a great deal invested in it, and will be *very* unlikely to let it go; and he is likely to *hate* the person who threatens it. There’s an old saying: No good deed goes unpunished. This is nowhere so true as of the man who delivers another man from a cherished wrong belief. It’s worse than telling him his daughter is ugly. I once tried to rescue a little dog that had gotten herself into a situation she couldn’t get out of. She was just trapped and whining and shaking, and I...I tried to help her. She bit me. I would rescue her again, but the next time I’ll wear gloves. I would suggest if you’re going to try to correct somebody, wear gloves.

Number 15: Deception tries to overpower truth. In person, deception will *shout down* the truth. Want to see some examples? Watch for it in the talking heads on television. In print, deception will use all manner of capital letters, italics, and exclamation points. It is like the preacher who included in his notes a reminder: “Shout like thunder here. Point weak.” Truth does not have to shout. I suspect shouting in sermons got started by preachers who couldn’t get their arguments together. They deserve the congregations that they have.

Number 16: Deception has no sense of humor. It is as serious as a train wreck; and if you make fun of it, in religion, you will be accused of not being *spiritual*—in politics, you’ll be accused of not being *serious*. Count on it, but persevere. Humor is one of the best antidotes for deception. Think of deception as a sickness and humor as a medicine, *but* avoid ridicule. Never ridicule a carrier unless you are wearing asbestos underwear.

Number 17: Deception has no real objective other than where you should *not* go. Now, this is an interesting thought: Deception may *pretend* an objective, but that’s a subterfuge. At the spiritual level—the religious level—the great Arch-Deceiver merely wants to keep you *away* from God. There’s a place he doesn’t want you to go. He has no use for you otherwise. He would probably *kill* you if he could get away with it. But the carriers of deception, they don’t want you dead; they want you to *validate them*; but in the end, they take you to the same place the Arch-Deceiver takes you: nowhere. That, my friends, is *his point*.

Number 18: (And you’ll be relieved to know this is the last.) Deception loves an argument. Deception is always trying to prove something to someone. Forget that. You can only prove something *for yourself*; you can never successfully prove something *to* someone else. When you try to *prove* things to other people, you are debating with them; and not much truth ever comes from debate. Here is something to remember about debate: In a formal debate, the participants have a side they are *required* to defend. So consequently, they’re not looking for truth at this point. They are looking to defend, they are looking to hold up, they’re looking to plaster it up to make it look good when it may not *be* very good. This is one of the things they *have to do*. You can prove things for yourself; don’t bother trying to prove them to anybody else. Deception *loves* an argument. Don’t play that game. Provide people with information and encourage them to prove things *for themselves*. Do that and there is no chance you can

ever become a carrier. What's my scripture for this one? Well, it's Second Timothy, chapter 2— Paul's... probably his last letter of his life, and he's writing to Timothy whom he loves dearly with one of the *great lessons* he has learned. He said:

2 Timothy 2

AKJV

²⁴ And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle to all men, apt to teach, patient,

²⁵ In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth[.]

Now, I have to tell you, I am sorry I did not learn this one earlier in life; but it's better late than never. Because back in my callow days I liked nothing better than to get on the internet; go to one of these debate rooms where they talk over doctrines; and then just have a good old, knock-down, drag-out fight with people on the internet. And then one day I came to this scripture, “the servant of the Lord must not strive”, and I put a *stop* to it.

Now, I'm sorry I have 18 of these. It would have been more symmetrical at 20 and more biblical at some multiple of seven; but only a carrier would modify his list to make the numbers right. Multiples of seven are used to give an argument a false cachet. If I really had 21, I'd have been tempted to combine two of them.

Until next time...

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