

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. In this session we will address the reality of deception at the end of the age as one of the main challenges (tests/trials) that we are facing and will face as Christians.

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"⁴ Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. (NIV Mat. 24:3-4)

- B. The greatest hour of trial for the church (and the world at large) is actually upon us! For those who are diligently watching into the signs of the times it is evident that "the Judge is standing at the door" (Jam. 5:9).

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. (ESV Mat 24:32-33)

- C. Since deception is one of the main issues before us, especially as the Day of His coming approaches, it is extremely important that we prayerfully give heed to Jesus' warnings about it.
- D. We will now continue with the three main parts of this session and its conclusion. First, I will talk about the origin of deception in the first chapters of the Bible and its nature as it is presented throughout Scripture; secondly, I will present several aspects of deception at the end of the age; thirdly, the call to be remain loyal to Jesus as we overcome deception will be given; and finally, I will conclude with a practical note about Christian community as a main source of protection against the deceiving schemes of the enemy.

II. DECEPTION IN THE BEGINNING: THE SEDUCTION OF THE SERPENT

- A. The drama concerning deception started in the Garden of Eden from the very beginning of creation.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say (deception oriented around the very words of God), 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die (again, deception seeks to contradict the words of God).⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food (appetites), and that it was a delight to the eyes (lust), and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (ESV Gen 3:1-6)

- B. Therefore, the witness of Scripture in its beginning chapters is foundational in relation to the issue of deception, and to deal with it. It should also be mentioned that Satan has been very aggressive in deceiving men about this beginning (i.e. the theory of evolution, labeling the genre as mythology, etc.), and we must be even more aggressive to seek and affirm its truth in our own heart, and in those that the Lord has put in our care.
- C. We see then that the Devil himself is the source of deception, or as Jesus called him, “the father of lies.”

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (ESV John 8:44)

- D. The goal of the enemy in seeking to deceive us is for us to betray the Lord *covenantally*, unto allying ourselves with him. In other words, the issue of deception or truth is always within a covenantal context. Adam violated the covenant with God when he and his wife Eve yielded to the seduction of the Serpent.

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God (truth) rather than burnt offerings. 7But like Adam they (Israel) transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me. (ESV Hos 6:6-7)

- E. Furthermore, Israel is the primary example of those who are deceived as they have “concealed” themselves “with deception” so as to make “a covenant with death.” Thus the Lord has a “case” with them.

Therefore, hear the word of the LORD, O scoffers, Who rule this people who are in Jerusalem, 15Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, And with Sheol we have made a pact. The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by (at the Day of the Lord), For we have made falsehood our refuge and we have concealed ourselves with deception." (NASB Isa 28:14-15)

Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, For the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land, Because there is no faithfulness or kindness Or knowledge of God in the land. 2There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed. (ESV Hos 4:1-2)

- F. Simply said, deception is born out of pride, an arrogant unbelief/distrust in God as the heart yields to the subtle seduction of Satan.

III. DECEPTION IN THE END: THE SEDUCTION OF THE SEED OF THE SERPENT

- A. Starting with the narrative of Genesis 3 the biblical drama concerning deception keeps intensifying throughout Scripture until it reaches its climactic point at the end of the age. This drama plays itself out specifically in terms of the conflict between the righteous and the wicked, or the Seed of the Woman and the Seed of the Serpent.

And I will put enmity Between (the Serpent) you and the woman (Eve), And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." (NASB Gen 3:15)

- B. This prophetic oracle set the stage for such an epic drama, and thus began the conflict of the ages. The main feature of this conflict during this age is the persecution of the righteous by the wicked. The latter adhere themselves to the deception of their father the Serpent, while the former remain true to God their Father. In the Psalms this conflict is laid out in very sharp terms. Here are a few examples:

How blessed is the man (the Righteous Messianic Seed) who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! ²But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night (unto loyal allegiance to the Lord and victory over deception). (NASB Psa 1:1-2)

O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach (the honor of the Righteous Messianic Seed opposed by the wicked sons of men)? How long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception? Selah. (NASB Psa 4:2)

In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor (a title usually given to the righteous); let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised. ³For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD (covenantal renouncing). ⁴In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "There is no God (the core of deception: "no God" and therefore no accountability before Him)." ⁵His ways prosper at all times; your judgments are on high, out of his sight; as for all his foes, he puffs at them. ⁶He says in his heart, "I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity." ⁷His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischievous and iniquity. (ESV Psa 10:2-7)

A Prayer of David. Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry! Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit! ²From your presence let my vindication come! Let your eyes behold the right! ³You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing (no deceit); I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress. ⁴With regard to the works of man, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent. (ESV Psa 17:1-4)

To the choirmaster (Brenton's LXX: "For the End"). A Maskil of David, when Doeg, the Edomite, came and told Saul, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech." Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God endures all the day. ²Your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit. ³You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking what is right. Selah ⁴You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue. (ESV Psa 52:1-4)

- C. In the end, the righteous will be avenged from the persecution and oppression of the wicked by means of the coming of the Righteous One, Jesus the Messiah, who will finally crush the Serpent and his Seed.

And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? ⁸I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth? (NKJV Lk 18:7-8)

Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. ⁵This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—⁶since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. (ESV 2Thess 1:4-10)

- D. According to the prophets, this apocalyptic end includes the coming of one man who will “make deceit prosper under his hand.” This is what was revealed to the prophet Daniel:

And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit, a king of bold face (the Wicked One), one who understands riddles, shall arise. ²⁴His power shall be great—but not by his own power (see Rev. 13:2, 5, 7, 14); and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints (the righteous). ²⁵By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes (the Righteous One), and he shall be broken—but by no human hand (but by God’s hand, His Messiah). (NASB Dan 8:23-25)

- E. Later on, the Jewish apostles carried the same witness as they confirmed by the Holy Spirit the appearance of “the man of lawlessness” just before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. As it was to be expected, deception is at the core of his appearance, and thus the apostles soberly warned believers about it.

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ²not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work (see 1 John 2:18). Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. ⁸And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the

appearance of his coming. ⁹The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹Therefore God sends them a strong delusion (a turning over because of persistent rebellion, see Rom. 1:18-32), so that they may believe what is false, ¹²in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (ESV 2Thess. 2:1-12)

F. Without any argument, the ultimate issue of deception is that of the Antichrist himself! In fact, the apostle John fully agreed with Paul regarding this issue as both of them testified prophetically to three primary things:

1. The mystery of lawlessness (or antichrist spirit) is already at work.

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. [...] (ESV 2Thess. 2:7a)

18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared... (NASB 1Jn 2:18a)

[...] and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. (NASB 1Jn 4:3)

2. The mystery of lawlessness and the coming of the Antichrist himself are the clearest signs of the times.

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. (NASB 1Jn 2:18)

Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction... (ESV 2Thess. 2:3)

3. His coming will be the apex of deception and the biggest challenge for the saints.

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, ¹²in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (ESV 2 Thess. 2:9-12)

Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ (the promised Messianic Seed who crushes the Serpent's head)? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father ("There is no God", see Psa. 10:4) and the Son (no Davidic covenant, see 2 Sam. 7; Psa. 2; 89). (NASB 1Jn 2:22)

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.
(*ESV 2Jn 1:7*)

IV. DECEPTION AND THE GOSPEL: REMAINING LOYAL AS A BETROTHED BRIDE

A. As I mentioned in the beginning, deception or truth always happens in context to covenant. By means of the gospel even we gentiles have been “betrothed” to Jesus on the basis of a new and everlasting covenant. Therefore, as believers we could be deceived in relation to our covenantal allegiance to the Messiah. Our loyal-love for Jesus will be tested through the fire of deception!

B. Paul had this perspective when confronting the saints at Corinth.

For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. ³But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (covenantal allegiance). ⁴For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. [...] ¹³For such men are false apostles (the Circumcision Group), deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end (at the Day of the Lord) will correspond to their deeds. (*ESV 2Co 11:2-15*)

C. The main problem with these false apostles was their preaching of a false gospel that required circumcision and observance of Moses’ Law (see Gal. 5). Their goal was to boast in the flesh instead of the cross, and the result was an abandonment of simple faith in Jesus.

Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. ¹⁴But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (no more allegiance to the world). (*NASB Gal 6:12-14*)

D. Along with this group, the apostles challenged the deception of what later became Gnosticism, which in simple terms was the distortion of the gospel through Greek philosophical ideas. This is the main heresy addressed in John’s letters. In the apostolic mind both issues were the Devil’s central strategy to deceive believers through the spirit of the Antichrist.

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called “knowledge” (Greek “Gnosis”)—²¹which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith (faithful allegiance to Jesus). Grace be with you. (*NASB 1Ti 6:20-21*)

- E. One had to do primarily with the identity and work of Christ at the Cross, the other with His identity and work at the Day of the Lord. One had a false boast, the other a false hope. They both constitute the perfect recipe for deception, and are a dangerous trap for us to deny the Lord if we yield into temptation. For the Judaizers it meant denying “the Cross of Christ” in order to avoid persecution (Gal. 6:12); for the Gnostics going “astray from the faith” (1Tim. 6:21).
- F. A false boast leaves us without an “entrance” into the future **hope** (see 2 Pet. 1:5-11). A false hope leaves us without an “anchor” so as to persevere in the **faith** even unto death (see Heb. 6:17-20). The end result will be “the **love** of many” growing cold, as they abandon Jesus and His gospel unto worshipping the Beast and taking his mark.

¹¹And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹²And because lawlessness will be increased¹, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³But the one who endures (in loyal faithful love) to the end will be saved (at the Day of the Lord). (ESV Mat 24:11-13)

³I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast (the Antichrist); ⁴they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?" [...] ⁷It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. ⁸All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. ⁹If anyone has an ear, let him hear. ¹⁰If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints. (NASB Rev 13:3-10)

- G. The sober call from the Lord is then for us to guard our hearts from deception and remain true to Him till the end by adhering to a “sound doctrine” (see 1Tim. 6:3-5). In reality the greatest challenge is not Satan, the Antichrist or the world, but the inclination and condition of own hearts.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
¹⁰"I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds (at the Day of the Lord)." (ESV Jer 17:9-10)

- H. The inclination of our heart determines whether or not we receive the truth and change our minds accordingly. If the agenda in our hearts is for glory, honor and money in this age, then we will be easily seduced by this world and reject the truth. This is what Jesus meant when He talked about “the cares of the world” and “the deceitfulness of riches” choking the word in us.

¹ “**G458** ἀνομία anomia *an-om-ee'-ah* From G459; *illegality*, that is, *violation of law* or (generally) *wickedness*: - iniquity, X transgress (-ion of) the law, unrighteousness.” (Strong Dictionary) The biblical sense of “lawlessness” is deviation from the covenantal stipulations of the Law unto unfaithfulness (lack of faith/unbelief) towards God. In any legitimate sense, the fulfillment of the Law is loving God and our neighbor faithfully (see Matt. 22:35-40; 23:23; John 14-15; Rom. 13:8-14; 1 John 2:3-6).

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (ESV Mat 13:22)

No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. ¹⁴*The Pharisees, who were lovers of money (love = motivation/inclination of heart), heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. ¹⁵And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men (by finding good arguments to defend their false gospel), but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted (and thus desired) among men is an abomination in the sight of God.* (ESV Lk 16:13-15)

- I. This will drastically play itself out at the end of the age in context to the mark of the Beast. The consequences of it having eternal implications.

Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, ¹⁷so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. (ESV Rev 13:16-17)

***Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." ¹²Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus (faithful love by obeying God and overcoming the deception of the enemy).* (NASB Rev 14:9-12)**

V. CONCLUSION: COVENANTAL COMMUNITY AS PROTECTION AGAINST DECEPTION

- A. The Father has a divine strategy to protect and preserve His people through the fires of deception at the end of the age. The main component of His strategy is for each of us to be a part of strong communities of believers who "abide in the truth" and "speak the truth in love" under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and of faithful shepherds.

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (NASB Jn 16:13)

I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. ⁵Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. ⁶And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. ⁷For many deceivers have gone out into the

world (the reason to love one another), **those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.** ⁸**Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward (at His coming).** ⁹**Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.** ¹⁰**If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house (i.e. house church/community of believers), and do not give him a greeting; ¹¹for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.** (NASB 2Jn 1:4-11)

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴**As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;** ¹⁵**but speaking the truth in love,** we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by **what every joint supplies,** according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself **in love** (i.e. loyal-love that remains true to the covenant). (NASB Eph 4:11-16)

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³**But exhort one another every day,** as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by **the deceitfulness of sin.** ¹⁴**For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.** (ESV Heb 3:12-14)

For **the overseer** must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, ⁸**but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,** ⁹**holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching,** so that he will be able both **to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.** ¹⁰**For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers,** especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹**who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.** (NASB Tit 1:7-11)

B. May God have mercy on us for His name's sake, and keep us in the narrow way till the end!