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IF IT WERE POSSIBLE

There came a day when the disciples asked Jesus, “...and what will be the sign of your coming, and of the close of the Age?” (Matt.24:3b- Weymouth New Testament). Then Jesus enumerated many woes that should take place at that time, and also warned, “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and they shall give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray **if possible, also the chosen.**” (Matt.24:24 Young’s Literal Translation) The gospel of Mark says, “...signs and wonders **to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.**” (Mk.13:22) I have often pondered this statement of Jesus. It clearly means that in the last days, corrupt spirits would rise up against God’s people, so much so that the “elect” would be tried and tested by deceptions so crafty and insidious that they could be deceived **if it were possible.** To better understand what Jesus was speaking about, it is good to see what He meant at that particular time, by being deceived, or seduced. One may think that Jesus was speaking of “false doctrines.” It is certain that all of us have come out of deception, or perhaps we are still deceived in some of our beliefs.

However, the deceiving or seducing that Jesus warned of at that time, is much more insidious and dangerous than contested doctrines such as “the rapture of the church,” “the literal city in the sky with streets of gold,” or even “the reconciliation of all men.” The truth or fallacy of these teachings will be revealed to all in God’s time. Jesus was talking about seducing spirits who snare unaware souls into following their own agenda, making them think they hear from God, when indeed they are being led by their rebellious, carnal minds. He was talking about seducing spirits that lure Christians away from the path of life that the Lord has set them upon. The deception is that they think they are following the voice of God, when indeed they are hearing from the disguised voice of the prince of this world.

Pride and rebellion are strong works of the flesh. The serpent knew this and used them mightily to deceive Eve into following after him. He seduced her into believing that by the power of her own intellect, ingenuity and ability to make decisions, she could lead a perfectly good life without God. When she took the bait, she opened her carnal mind to the serpent, and became an enemy of God. “*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*” (Rom.8:7) The serpent entered the mind of the soul, and can only be defeated when we put on the mind of Christ. The sly serpent knew the weaknesses that were present in the woman of earth, (soul), he aroused her desires with his most tantalizing lie, and she proudly swallowed the whole thing.

So the question is, “what protects God’s elect from being deceived? First, it is worth repeating that the elect are not “elites.” Elites are groups of people who are considered the best in a class. They are set in a place of authority over people. There are no elite in Christ, Jesus said, “*But the greatest among you shall be your servant.*” (Matt.23:11) The “elect” as Jesus calls them are those who have been chosen or elected for a special service in God’s purpose. Those are trained, disciplined and prepared for the task. They are the ones that Jesus is talking about when He speaks of the “very elect, or chosen.” History tells us of “saints,” or “elect,” that have risen among men to perform the will of God, and have been sorely persecuted and even suffered death for their acts. I always think of the 17 year old peasant girl, Joan of Arc, who during the 100 year war in France, saw in a vision, the Archangel Michael. He told

her that she had been chosen of God, to recover France from English domination. She went to the King and was armed for the task. After several victories, the French armies regained the confidence and strength needed to end the war. Later, a pro-English French bishop declared Joan to be an heretic and she was burnt alive on a stake in Rouen France; she was 19.

We know of many more saints of God who were tortured and killed for obeying their calling. Certainly Jesus Himself is our greatest Pattern, and Hebrews chapter 11 lists many as well. These are part of the company of God's "elect." They did not ask for their position, they were chosen and called to it. *"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, **but I have chosen you out of the world**, therefore the world hateth you."* (Jn.15:19) *"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you..."* (Jn.15:16) The elect have been chosen, not because they are above others, but because they are trained for God's mighty plan to deliver His creation.

TRAINING THE ELECT- There are many good studies on "discernment," yet discernment is a gift of God and cannot be learned by theories. We know that by studying the true, we are likely to quickly recognize the false, but our enemy is extremely sly and he knows all the tricks of the trade. Jesus gave us the key to the sure way to counter deception when He said, *"Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me."* (Jn.14:30). Jesus had absolutely no interest in, or likeness to anything that the prince or the systems of this world could present to Him; He had no part of anything that runs this world's political, religious, social, educational as well as other man-made systems. He had absolutely nothing to do with them. He knew the entanglement that such things can weave as traps. Jesus is the complete opposite of the prince of this world. He was then the Word made flesh in this world, and He is now the Word made flesh in us; He never changes. *"Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, and today, and forever."* (Heb.13:8)

The easiest way that deception can trip us is best described by James, *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."* (Jms.1:13-14) The lusts or strong appetites and desires of our flesh open the way to deception. This is why God's Holy Spirit is changing us from inside out. He leads the elect to perfect obedience to God's will, by daily dealings in even the smallest happenings of their daily lives, so that God's ways become their ways. He leads them in ways opposite to popularly accepted teachings to test their faithfulness to God's voice. He leads them into solitary places until He slowly removes from them the desires for things that others are still able to enjoy; He makes them "a peculiar people." *"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and holy nation, **a peculiar people...**"* (I Pet.2:9) The Lord was not speaking of an "odd" people, but a people like no other who are a treasure to God, a people set aside for His purpose.

And so, as God's peculiar people, we have been cut off from former fellowship meetings. We have been called "deceived" or even "deceivers" by those who cannot understand and accept the way that the Holy Spirit has led us. But through it all we are learning to know His ways and to look to Him and Him only. Above all, we are learning to closely follow Him at any cost. We have been trained to be as lambs who follow only the voice of our Shepherd, wherever He goes. We have learned to submit and never rebel. A lamb is an animal with no defense at all; no horns, no venom, nothing but the care of the Shepherd. It has been said that, "A man with an experience, is never at the mercy of a man with an argument." And so our God establishes us by experience. *"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits"* (Ps.103:2)

Because He is love, *Jackie Caporaso*