

1 Corinthians 3:18; 4:14

1 Corinthians 3:18 **Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become (truly) wise . . .** ¹⁴ *I am writing this not to shame you but to admonish you as my beloved children.*

One of the most sobering themes in the Bible is that fallen human beings are extremely vulnerable to spiritual self-deception. “Do not deceive yourselves,” Paul said to the Corinthian Christians. Many of them had embraced a philosophy of life that was profoundly contrary to God’s perspective. Yet they believed that they had become wise – wiser even the apostle Paul, who had introduced them to Jesus and wrote half of the books in the New Testament! If you wonder how they could have gotten so far off, you don’t know yourself very well.

Throughout the Old Testament and New Testament, God warns us of spiritual self-deception. Consider these passages:

Proverbs 3:5 **Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and *do not lean on your own understanding.*** ⁶ *In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.* ⁷ **Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil.** Here Solomon warns his son against the deadly danger of assuming that he knows within himself the way to live his life.

Matthew 6:22 “**The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.** ²³ **But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the ‘light’ that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!**” Jesus warns us (in context) that pursuing materialistic values will distort our spiritual vision, and make us think that we see better than others. It is one



thing to be blind and know it; it is far more tragic to be blind and think that you see!

Luke 18:9 **Jesus told this parable to some people who *trusted in themselves that they were righteous*, and viewed others with contempt.** Jesus reserves His harshest words for outwardly religious people. He does not do this because He hates them, but because He loves them. He knows that their self-righteousness has deceived them into thinking that they have merited God's acceptance. It may take painful exposure by Jesus to jolt us out of our self-righteous blindness into the sane awareness that we need to ask God for His mercy through Jesus.

Revelation 3:1 **"I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ² Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain . . . for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.** Jesus issues a strong wake-up call to Christians who were resting on their laurels – assuming that their reputation based on past service guaranteed their current spiritual health. What a timely word for those of us who are several decades into our Christian lives!

One of God's main means of protecting or rescuing us from spiritual self-deception is other Christians who love us enough to admonish (correct) us. This is what Paul did for the Corinthian Christians. "I am writing this *not* to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children." He asked them penetrating questions (see 1 Cor. 4:7), and he even resorted to godly sarcasm (see 1 Cor. 4:8). Although they may have felt shame from his words, his only intent was to wake them up so they could begin to prosper spiritually.

What good parent ever desires to shame his children? But all good parents know that their children are sometimes foolish and veer into danger while pridefully thinking they are safe. How blessed such children are to have parents who will take wise and timely and (if necessary) painful measures to help them back on track.

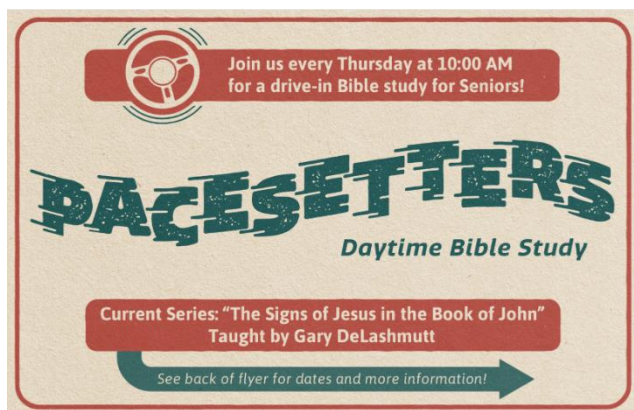


God has put other Christians into our lives for this purpose. They can see what we do not currently see. They can sense the spiritual danger of which we are oblivious. They have words of truth that can wake us up – if we are willing to listen to them. My own spiritual life has been rescued by such friends on many occasions. Maybe you can say the same thing. Maybe you need such a friend right now because you are drifting into spiritual danger without even knowing it.

A traffic light has three colored lights –green (“Go”), yellow (“Caution”), and red (“Stop”). What light are you flashing to your Christian friends? Is your posture “Don’t you dare reprove me; mind your own business!” This is the norm for our culture, but according to Solomon, it is the posture of a fool. Is your posture “You had better proceed with extreme caution!” We can wrongly demand that others correct us perfectly before we are willing to listen. Or is your posture “I trust that you love me and I know that I can be deceived, so please speak truth to me even if it hurts.” This is the posture of wisdom – and it will lead to spiritual safety and even greater wisdom!

Lord Jesus, thank You that You love me enough to admonish me. I would still be alienated from God if You had not shown me that I needed Your forgiveness. I would have made a terrible mess of my life if You had not corrected me many times. I know that I am vulnerable to spiritual self-deception. Help me to listen to the loving correction that You speak to me – either through Your Word, or through Your children.

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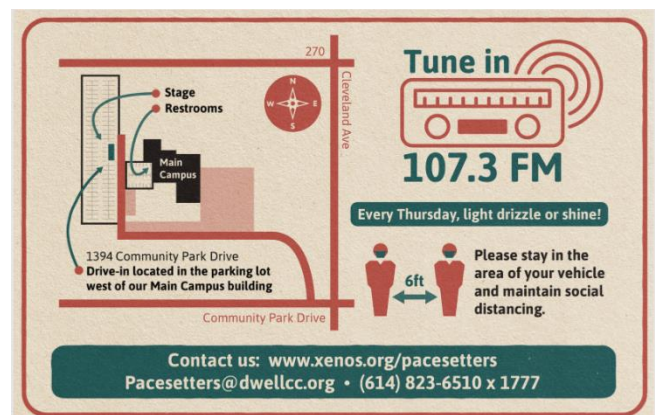


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