**BE NOT DECEIVED**

***Satan’s Ponzi Scheme***

Have you ever heard of Charles Ponzi? If not, how about Bernie Madoff? Financial tricksters and con artists revere these two men. Ponzi was an Italian immigrant to America who concocted a plan to sell postage stamp coupons in 1920 with a return rate of 50% profit for the investor. Tens of thousands of “investors” were eventually swindled out of over $20,000,000 (translated into $225 million in today’s dollars). It became known as a Ponzi Scheme.

Bernie Madoff, by 2008, had pulled off the exact same scheme with high-flying wealthy people’s investments to the tune of $19 billion. That is the largest financial scam in U.S. history. This 83 year old is now serving a 150-year prison sentence. He has 138 years to go, eligible for release when he is 221. If only he lived in the days of the patriarchs.

How, you may ask, could anyone be swindled out of their entire life’s savings based on a “too good to be true” return of their investment? That is easy to answer. Since the Garden of Eden man has fallen to the deception of Satan’s lies. Eve believed the Tempter when he told her God was holding out on her and that she could be as wise as her Creator (Genesis 3:4-5). Paul said of this sin: “*And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being* ***deceived****, fell into transgression*” (I Tim. 2:14).

You see, the Devil is in the “Smoke and Mirrors” business of promising more than he can deliver. It has always been so that sin takes you further than you want to go, leaves you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay. Ponzi and Madoff made a deal with the Devil and he taught them his old tricks.

Man, by his very nature, believes he is too smart and wise to be duped into such schemes. You and I would “*never*” fall for the old slight-of-hand deception of Ponzi or Madoff, would we? In point of fact, we have fallen for it repeatedly since we first crossed that line called “the age of accountability.” For instance, can you deny the following verses in your own life?

 “*Do not be* ***deceived****: "Evil company corrupts good habits*" (I Cor. 15:33).

“*But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent* ***deceived*** *Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ*.” ( 2 Cor. 11:3).

“*Do not be* ***deceived****, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*” (Gal. 6:7).

“*For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient,* ***deceived****, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, and hating one another*” (Tit 3:3).

Paul once warned Christians not to think they couldn’t be scammed by the Devil, telling them “*let him who thinks he stands,* *take heed, lest you fall*” (I Cor. 10:12). If educated and savvy businessmen could be bamboozled by the promises of fast-talking schemers like Ponzi or Madoff to make a fast fortune, do you think Satan can’t convince you to “*believe the lie*” regarding your own love of the world? I beg you, in fact I get down on my knees and plead with you, to read this warning from Paul to the Thessalonians:

9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they *did not receive the love of the truth*, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who *did not believe the truth* but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” – 2 Thess. 2:9-12

Did you get that? “*The working of Satan*” will always, always, always deceive those who “*do not* *receive the love the truth”* and “*do not* *believe the truth*.” Satan’s one focus is deception. And his *modus operandi* is twisting the truth so that men “*should believe the lie*” so that they might have “*pleasure in unrighteousness*.” All he has to do is “*twist*” the scriptures just enough to convince men they are doing the right thing (2 Pet. 3:16).

Every investor in Charles Ponzi’s system thought he was taking a short cut to that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. There was enough believability in Ponzi’s scheme to make them certain this was a fool-proof road to riches. Also, I just finished reading a paper on how Bernie Madoff carried out his Ponzi scheme from 1970 to 2008 (that’s 38 years!) and robbed brilliant people, Hollywood stars, and Wall Street icons out of billions of dollars. People you would never believe could be hood-winked out of their entire life’s savings were deceived by this former chairman of the NASDAQ stock exchange for nearly four decades!

No, you might not fall for the “Make Money Fast” internet promise from Nigeria who asks you to “hold” a million dollars for them. You are too savvy to ever give them your bank account number… right? While you might not fall for that obvious scheme you can’t tell me you have never fallen for “*the pleasures of sin for a season*” (Heb 11:25). I know I have, more times than I care to remember.

From the moment we read of “the knot in the devil’s tail” (that’s a pun – taken from Eve believing the devil’s lie (tale) that “you shall ***not*** surely die”) – man has been falling to the Deceiver’s deceptions. Like Ponzi, and like Madoff, the old devil has a way of convincing us that this “*pleasure*” is forever, not just “*for a season*.” At first, every time we fell to his deception we felt the prick of our guilty conscience telling us we were wrong. But, in time, if we are not moved to godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:10), our conscience can be “*seared* *as with a hot iron*” (I Tim. 4:2). Like Demas, we too can forsake the Lord, “*having loved this present world*” (2 Tim. 4:10).

“*Be not deceived*” is a warning not only for financial investors, but for all who are sleep walking through life singing “It is well, it is well, with my soul.” Satan, like Ponzi or Madoff, will hum and sing that hymn with you all day long, if you will only believe them.

Brethren, watch and pray. – Rick