

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God

IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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Craftiness in Deceitful Scheming

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by ***craftiness in deceitful schemes***. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:11-16 ESV [bold italic added])

There is a secular expression that says: *Get on the bandwagon*. According to Wikipedia, it is called "the bandwagon effect" and is the observation that people do and believe things because many other people do and believe the same things. Simply, people tend to follow the crowd without examining the merits of a particular thing. Unfortunately, the bandwagon effect can be quite successful and gather up a lot of people. It is like a fad and referred to as the *herd mentality*. The more people who go along with it, the more people will join it without examining it carefully. As they say, people "hop on the bandwagon."

The bandwagon originated as a wagon that carried a band in a parade, circus, or other entertainment, and the phrase "jump on the bandwagon" was first used in American politics. People (voters) would jump on political bandwagons, that is, support certain candidates for office, not necessarily based on the merits of the candidate's positions. In our modern age of instant communications, polls, focus groups, and biases from the news media, it is easy to see how a nation can become so fixated on politics and so steered by the views of the news media and the almost endless number of so-called experts and commentators that people jump on the bandwagon of candidates, not so much based on facts but much more on what the herd is doing.

Now, this might seem like I am about to launch into a discussion of the present race for the next president of the US. This is not what is on my mind. I am thankful that we have a King who is seated on the throne and ready to come to this earth to set things right.

Some years ago, the matter of bandwagons came to me as I was meditating on what is going on in the visible or public church of our day. As I meditated, the word *fad* came to me, and I felt that I was to do a word search and look at the first thing that came along. Well, it was this matter of bandwagon that popped up.

It seems to me that some (perhaps, many) of the Lord's people hop on the bandwagon because many others are doing it. By this, I mean that there is a herd mentality amongst the Lord's people that leads them to follow after every new wind that blows through the pews, bookstores, and the Internet. For example, someone writes a book and someone with a name endorses it and the next thing you know it is a best seller and the author is a new leader of the modern-day church. It matters not if there are things in the book that are not quite according to scripture or are extra-Biblical in an inaccurate sort of way. What matters to the masses is that everyone else is reading it or following it (whatever it is).

This leads to the verses quoted above, especially verse 14 which, in the Concordant Literal Version (CLV), reads *by craftiness with a view to the systematizing of the deception*. This phrase seems to capture the heart of what Paul meant. Other translations use phrases like *systematized error* (DNT), *clever strategies that would lead us astray* (ISV), and *plot to seduce in their subtlety* (JMT).

I believe Paul was conveying to the ecclesia that a system of thought could be developed based on error, especially based on a spirit to deceive, that becomes a system of thought that permeates how one views many things.

Systematizing is not merely accepting something false; it is building an entire framework based on a deception, so that everything is seen through this deception. Take Paul's hope of the *out*-resurrection as an example. As a former Pharisee, Paul believed in a literal resurrection of the body, and he held to this belief after the Lord broke into his life. In fact, 1 Corinthians 15 is a defense of the resurrection of not only the Lord Jesus but of all mankind. However, some have taken Paul's use of the word *resurrection* and made it a spiritual resurrection one receives in this life. The result is that the one thing that is essential to the hope of believers is systematically put in a lower place of importance, ignored, or distorted. But it is worse than this, for Paul's real hope was not to appear in the general resurrection of the dead but to appear in the *out*-resurrection or the resurrection *from* the dead. If you don't know the difference between the two, you may have fallen for the systematizing of the deception.

One of the devil's greatest achievements has been the systematizing of deception. He has not only succeeded in taking what is false but in taking it and packaging it into a systematic framework and then passing it off as the truth of God's word. It appears as light but at its very core is darkness. Many of God's people have been hooked into various frameworks of deception. I confess that at times in my life I have, so I only have the greatest amount of compassion on my brethren who write and teach in this day. I pray frequently that I not fall into deception but remain open to correction in all that I see or write.

I suspect that there are many such examples of systematized deception in the doctrines and teachings of the "church." Many of them have become the tradition of men and those who teach them are simply pawns in the game of deception. This does not necessarily mean that they are deceivers, but that they have been deceived themselves and are simply unknowingly passing the deception along to others who willingly jump on the bandwagon without verifying if it is truth or not.

Unfortunately, I believe that there is an even more insidious thing happening in our day. When people are warned that something is amiss, they don't seem to want to hear it or to care that it might be off. It is as if they have become dull of hearing or hardened to the truth. They are more interested in being excited, or, as Paul warned, the time has come that they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Are we so naïve to think that this cannot happen in our day? It is not uncommon to hear people respond to such challenges by saying "God is much bigger than that" or "no one has all the truth." To this last point, this is true, for we all see dimly, but this should not be an excuse for being lazy with the truth, not verifying what we hear or read, or worse, desiring to hear only what appeals to us, that is, tickles our ear.

In our day of instant gratification and media intensity, we need to question any new so-called *spiritual matter, event, teaching, or prophetic word*, especially when everyone is jumping on the bandwagon. My warning to all that have an ear to hear is that the Christian bandwagon of our day may lead you astray and away from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. Perhaps, it is time for some to jump off the bandwagon and cling to Jesus and Him alone. It is time to grow up, to mature in Christ.

Dear beloved in Christ, let us not jump on every new bandwagon that comes along.

Let us be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves. Let us discern in spirit all that we hear and see. Let us test the spirits. Let us look for true fruit of the spirit, the fruit of righteousness.

Let us love the truth, seek to know the truth, and walk in the truth (2 John 1, 4).