

# Self Deception

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## I. Self-deception

1. Deceive *v.* - 1. *trans.* To ensnare; to take unawares by craft or guile; to overcome, overreach, or get the better of by trickery; to beguile or betray into mischief or sin; to mislead. *Obs.* (or *arch.*) 2. To cause to believe what is false; to mislead as to a matter of fact, lead into error, impose upon, delude, 'take in'. b. *absol.* To use deceit, act deceitfully. c. *refl.* To allow oneself to be misled; to delude oneself.
2. We are prone to self-deception because we love lies (**Isa 30:10; Jer 5:31; Jer 38:3-4; Mic 2:11**).
  - A. Men deceive themselves by telling themselves things that are false because they don't want to believe the truth (**Jer 37:9**).
  - B. We love lies because:
    - i. The truth requires effort to obtain (**Pro 23:23**).
    - ii. The truth hurts (**Joh 8:40; Act 7:54**).
    - iii. The truth is depressing (**Ecc 1:18**).
    - iv. The truth will cause us to lose friends and be rejected by others (**Gal 4:16**).
    - v. The truth about ourselves is hard to accept (**Mat 26:34-35**).
    - vi. The truth is not flattering.
    - vii. The truth is inconvenient; it makes life difficult.
    - viii. The truth gets in the way of our plans, desires, and lusts.
    - ix. The truth requires us to change.
  - C. "Men stumble over the truth from time to time, but most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing happened." – Winston Churchill
  - D. "Truth is treason in an empire of lies." - Ron Paul
3. We are prone to self-deception because our hearts are *deceitful* above all things (**Jer 17:9**).
  - A. God asked rhetorically concerning our deceitful heart, "who can know it?"
  - B. If we can't know our own heart, how easy then is it to be self-deceived!
  - C. To resist being deceived we must guide our hearts by the word of God (**Pro 4:23; Pro 23:19**).
  - D. We must never trust in it (in our emotions) (**Pro 28:26; Mar 7:21-23**).
4. Sin will deceive us (**Rom 7:11**).
  - A. Our lusts are deceitful (**Eph 4:22**).
    - i. Our deceitful lusts are desires for such things as money, possessions, sex, power, prestige, attention, recognition, leisure, or pleasure.
    - ii. They trick us into thinking that we will be better off if we satisfy them.
    - iii. Our flesh tries to deceive our spirit into doing what we should not (**Gal 5:16-17**).

- B. Sin uses our own lust to entice us and to draw us away from the keeping God's commandments (**Jam 1:15-16**).
  - C. Sin is deceitful (**Heb 3:13**).
  - D. Our sinful lusts will deceive us into thinking that we will not lose our place in the church if we sin (**1Co 6:9-10**).
5. We are commanded to not deceive ourselves (**1Co 3:18**).
- A. If we think that we are wise before we have realized that we know nothing, we have deceived ourselves.
  - B. If we say that we have no sin, we have deceived ourselves (**1Jo 1:8**).
    - i. There is not a person on this earth that does not sin (**Rom 3:23; Ecc 7:20**).
    - ii. Therefore, if we think that we don't ever sin, we have deceived ourselves.
6. Many religious people are self-deceived.
- A. People that claim to be religious but don't control their tongue have deceived themselves (**Jam 1:26**).
    - i. Their religion is worthless.
    - ii. They will only fool others for a while until they get to know them and hear them speak.
  - B. Men dream up dreams that they never had to deceive themselves (**Jer 29:8**).
7. Know thyself
- A. A wise man understands his own way, but fools deceive themselves (**Pro 14:8**).
  - B. I know people who don't know themselves.
    - i. They make statements about what they are going to do, and in many cases they probably believe themselves.
    - ii. But I can discern very easily that they will never do what they say they are planning to do.
  - C. We must examine ourselves (**2Co 13:5; 1Co 11:28; Lam 3:40**).
    - i. We must pray that God would search our hearts and reveal to us what we really are (**Psa 26:2; Psa 139:23-24; Job 6:24; Job 13:23; Job 34:32; Psa 19:12**).
    - ii. We must think about where we're going in life and make sure we are on the straight and narrow (**Pro 4:26-27**).
    - iii. We will never grow as Christians until we take an honest look at ourselves and admit the truth about ourselves.
  - D. Our own strength and success can deceive us into thinking we are greater than we are (**Jer 49:16; Oba 1:3-4**).
  - E. We often deceive ourselves into thinking we are something when we are nothing (**Gal 6:3**).
    - i. This is called *delusions of grandeur*.
    - ii. Delusion *n.* - 3. a. Anything that deceives the mind with a false impression; a deception; a fixed false opinion or belief with regard to objective things, esp. as a form of mental derangement. b. *delusions of grandeur*: a false belief concerning one's personality or status, which is thought to be more important than it is.
    - iii. We've all met people who think they are great singers, writers, intellectuals, sports players, musicians, etc. that objectively are *not*.
    - iv. They view themselves highly because of their pride.

- a. Pride *n.* - B. Signification. The quality of being proud. I. 1. a. A high or overweening opinion of one's own qualities, attainments, or estate, which gives rise to a feeling and attitude of superiority over and contempt for others; inordinate self-esteem.
      - b. To admit the truth about themselves would wound their lofty self-image.
    - v. Such people have only deceived themselves, but not others.
    - vi. Such a man needs to honestly evaluate and prove his own work before he rejoices in it (**Gal 6:4**).
8. People often deceive themselves when they want to do something, even though they know that it's not godly or wise to do so.
  - A. The reason for this is because children of God have a conscience which accuses them when they do something they know is sinful, wrong, or foolish (**Rom 2:15; Heb 10:2**).
    - i. This creates a feeling of guilt and uneasiness which makes them feel stressed and uncomfortable.
    - ii. They don't like having that feeling, but at the same time, they want to do what they want to do.
    - iii. What then are they to do?
    - iv. They must deceive themselves and convince themselves that what they want to do is actually okay.
  - B. They talk themselves into it by rationalizing away the reasons that they should not do it.
    - i. Instead of saying 'no' to themselves quickly, they keep mulling it over in their mind.
    - ii. The more they think about it, the more acceptable it becomes to them.
    - iii. Watch out for this!
  - C. They talk to other people about it whom they know will validate what they want to do (**2Ch 18:3-5**).
    - i. This feeds into the self-deception.
    - ii. They now have validation from other (likely foolish) people for what they want to do.
    - iii. Now they can tell themselves and others that they sought advice before making the decision.
  - D. They avoid talking to anyone about it whom they perceive will disapprove of it and would try to talk them out of it (**2Ch 18:6-7, 17**).
    - i. This feeds into the self-deception.
    - ii. They can now tell themselves that nobody thinks this is a bad idea.
  - E. They avoid getting the pastor's advice on the matter.
    - i. They instead *inform* the pastor of their plans or decision as a courtesy to him, but never actually seek his counsel.
      - a. This feeds into the self-deception.
      - b. They can now tell themselves that the pastor is okay with it, even though the pastor didn't *say* he is okay with it.
    - ii. If they do ask for the pastor's advice, it is merely with the hope that he will rubberstamp what they have already decided to do.

- a. If the pastor advises them against it, they will then rationalize away his advice by telling themselves that he doesn't really understand the situation.
    - b. They can then tell themselves that they didn't disregard or go against the pastor's advice because his advice was based on his lack of understanding and experience.
  - F. Their ideas are right in their own eyes (**Pro 12:15**).
    - i. They are not wise enough to seek counsel (**Pro 12:15**).
    - ii. Their ways are clean to them, but God (or wise men around them) is not fooled (**Pro 16:2; Pro 21:2**).
    - iii. Their way *seems* right to them, but in the end it leads to destruction (**Pro 16:25**).
    - iv. If they reject offers for advice from friends, their friends will stop offering it (**Job 32:1**).
    - v. This is why it's crucial to get good counsel early to avoid self-deception (**Pro 11:14; Pro 15:22; Pro 20:18; Pro 24:6**).
  - G. It has been my observation during my nearly 38 years of life, 15 years of being a Christian in true churches, and seven years of pastoring that very few people sincerely seek counsel before deciding to do something they want to do.
    - i. And this is true even of people who have heard me repeatedly exhort the brethren from the scriptures of the importance of seeking counsel before making major life decisions.
    - ii. Other men of God have told me that they have had similar experiences, so I don't think that my experience is a result of my age.
    - iii. I have just had to accept the fact that I am contending with human nature which is very hard to overcome.
- 9. People often deceive themselves concerning why they did something.
  - A. Remember, there are usually two reasons why someone did something.
    - i. There is the *presented reason* that they tell others and often tell themselves.
    - ii. And then there is the *real reason* which rarely gets admitted to, but is often not hard for others to perceive.
  - B. The *presented reason*
    - i. Another name for the presented reason is the *BS excuse*.
    - ii. We tell the *presented reason* to ourselves because we don't want to admit the truth to ourselves.
    - iii. An example of this was the servant that was given one talent and hid it in the earth instead of investing it (**Mat 25:24-25**).
      - a. His *presented reason* for hiding the talent in the earth was fear of his hard master.
      - b. The *real reason* was that he was lazy (**Mat 25:26**).
        - (i) Lazy people use fear as an excuse for their laziness (**Pro 22:13**).
        - (ii) Many people today are using fear of the Coronavirus as an excuse for not going back to work and staying on unemployment because they are lazy!

- c. His lord did not accept his *BS excuse* and neither will our Lord (**Mat 25:27-30**).
  - iv. We tell others the *presented reason* because we don't want to be embarrassed about what we did or why we did it.
  - v. In order for us to not be convicted in our hearts about lying, we must first convince ourselves that the *presented reason* is the *real reason* before we try to convince others.
  - vi. Many times we give the *presented reason* because we are afraid of what people might think if they knew the *real reason* (even though they usually know the real reason despite of the smokescreen we have tried to erect to cover it).
- C. The *real reason*
  - i. The real reason is usually not virtuous.
  - ii. It is usually embarrassing to admit, or at the least casts us in a negative light.
  - iii. The real reason often comes down to simply wanting to fulfill our lusts and desires.
- D. Examples of *presented vs. real reasons*.
  - i. You bought the latest iPhone
    - a. The presented reason: My old one didn't have enough memory, or it was getting slow, or it was going to die any day, or...
    - b. The real reason: I wanted it.
  - ii. You buy your children smartphones.
    - a. The presented reason: They might need them to contact me in an emergency.
    - b. The real reason: The children wanted them, and I capitulated because I was tired of hearing their whining, I didn't want to look like a mean parent in everyone's eyes, and I didn't want my kids to be picked on by their peers for not having one.
  - iii. You close down a business that you were trying to get going.
    - a. The presented reason: I didn't really like products I was selling, or I don't feel like working for myself anymore.
    - b. The real reason: I was losing money and was not profitable.
  - iv. You post a picture of your family on Facebook.
    - a. The presented reason: I want our relatives to be able to see them.
    - b. The real reason: I want to show off to all of my "friends" and show them what an awesome life it appears that I have.
  - v. You stay at home and don't go out and work.
    - a. The presented reason: It's dangerous out there (**Pro 26:13**).
    - b. The real reason: I'm lazy.
  - vi. You run for political office.
    - a. The presented reason: I want to serve the public.
    - b. The real reason: I want a cushy job with power, prestige, and fringe benefits.

10. How to recognize if you are self-deceived.

- A. If you have avoided *truly* asking advice from wise people who you think will not agree with your plans or decisions, then there is a high likelihood that you are self-deceived.
  - B. If you automatically dismiss the idea that you have deceived yourself, then you have probably deceived yourself.
  - C. If you rationalize away the fact that you did not truly seek wise counsel before making a decision, you are most likely self-deceived.
11. How to avoid self-deception
- A. Truly seek wise counsel before making an important decision (**Pro 11:14; Pro 15:22**).
  - B. If you know that what you are contemplating to do is sinful or unwise, tell yourself 'no' immediately, and keep telling yourself 'no' every time the thought arises.
  - C. If you have doubts in your conscience about a decision, stop and seek counsel before you sear your conscience (**1Ti 4:2; Eph 4:19**).
  - D. Sincerely ask God to give you wisdom to make good decisions and to save you from yourself (**Jam 1:5-8**).
  - E. Be honest with yourself.
    - i. Quit telling yourself BS excuses for doing things you do.
    - ii. Quit believing yourself when deep-down you know better.
    - iii. Ask yourself, "what is the *real reason* I did that?".
    - iv. Ask yourself, "am I *really* going to do what I just said I was going to do, or am I just telling it to myself or others so that I look good?".