

## Perception, Perspective, and Reality

Years ago, a brother in Christ told me that “Perception is reality.” Although I disagreed at the time, and still do, thinking through the statement was helpful in understanding people generally, and our thought processes, capabilities and limitations more specifically. The resulting conclusion was that our *perception* becomes a *self-imposed, extremely limiting, and personal* “reality” when it is closed off from new or additional information, or information that differs from our concept of what is true.

A simple illustration should help. I may *perceive* (and firmly and personally believe) that driving north from Indianapolis will allow me to visit family in Texas. As long as I continue to close myself off from additional or contradictory information, or as long as I don’t actually get on the road and put my perception to the test, then I continue to maintain the delusion that Texas is north of Indianapolis. Then, *to* and *for* me, Texas will be north of Indianapolis. In reality, Texas is obviously not north of Indianapolis but well south and west of it. Thus, my “perception”- though very *real* and *personal* to me, is not in fact reality, but a *self-imposed* delusion predicated on the refusal of new or contradictory information.

So, how do we keep from falling into the trap of allowing our **spiritual perceptions** and **perspectives** from becoming *self-imposed* and *extremely limiting* delusions? Here are a few fundamental suggestions:

- 1. Be willing to “examine everything carefully,” 1Thessalonians 5:21a.** Being *open-minded* enough to critically challenge “what I was taught” or “what I’ve always believed” is NOT easy. Consider Peter in these regards. It was hard for him to change his perspective of, and therefore his perception of, the Gentiles. They had always been “*unclean*” to him, cf. Acts 10:11-16,28-29. But because he was willing to consider alternative information from what he had always been taught and what he had always believed, his whole perception changed, Acts 10:34-35. We must be open-minded enough to seriously consider perspectives and perceptions different from our own to grow and progress spiritually. Otherwise, we create delusional “realities” for “*the sake of your (or our) tradition,*” Matthew 15:3ff. Remember that “unquestioned answers” are just as dangerous to our perceptions and perspectives as “unanswered questions,” if not more so!
- 2. Be willing to “hold fast to that which is good,” 1Thessalonians 5:21b.** Having *carefully examined everything*- that is, fully considering all available information and its implications and applications, we must “*hold fast*” (*katecho-* to *get, take, or keep firm possession of*) to what is “*good.*” Obviously, great care must be taken to *discern* the *good* from the *bad*. We can’t allow our own preconceived notions to impair either our willingness to consider new/different information, or to prejudice our discernment of its value. But once this screening, shifting, and discerning process has resulted in an unbiased and objective view of what we believe to be truth, we must *latch onto it* with zeal, fervor, and determination. Saul of Tarsus went from a dedicated and zealous *persecutor* to a devoted and passionate *preacher* of Jesus Christ because once he was presented with “new” and “better” information, he was willing to cling to it tenaciously.

3. **Be willing to let go of and “abstain from every form of evil,” 1Thessalonians 5:22.** This *holding fast to the good* must be also coupled with a willingness to *let go of the bad/evil*. It doesn't matter how long I've believed it, how deeply it has been imbedded in my mind, or the stature or number of those who have taught it otherwise, if it is not true and right according to all that I can discern from *examining everything carefully*, I must abandon it completely! The word here translated as “form” or “appearance” (*eidos*) has to do with “what is visible (in man or object),” Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. It does not mean, as some perhaps well-meaning but over-zealous expositors may have implied, that “if it even *appears* bad, avoid it.” Remember that it “looked bad” for Jesus to “*eat with the tax-gatherers and sinners*” to the Pharisees in Matthew 9:11ff, but the reality was very different. True “forms” of evil are to avoided at all times and costs, but let's not make God's word and its requirements subject to our potentially flawed perceptions about what might “*appear*” to be evil to us. If God said it is “*sin*,” then *sin* it is. But just because it “doesn't look right to me” (or you), doesn't necessarily make it sinful, cf. 1Corinthians 8.

Thus, after “*examining everything carefully*” to discern what is “*good*,” and “*holding fast to what is good*,” we must also be willing to *let go of* and “*abstain from every form of evil*” (the *bad*). Only then can our **perceptions** (*what* we see) and **perspectives** (*how* we see) line up with **reality** (what is true, and thus what can/must be legitimately seen).

Finally, think soberly about Jesus' words to the Pharisees in John 9:39-41, “*For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and that those who see may become blind.*’ Those Pharisees who were with Him heard these things, and said to Him, ‘We are not blind too, are we?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.’” The Pharisees thought they had all the answers- that they could “see.” But in reality, they were “blind” because they would not see the Truth that was before them... because it was “new,” it was “different,” and it wasn't what they had “always been taught” and “had always believed.” Let's not be pharisaical, but willing to “*examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good*” and “*abstain from every form of evil*”! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at [southportcofc.org](http://southportcofc.org); email to [mrpcstrong@hotmail.com](mailto:mrpcstrong@hotmail.com))