

"Where we have strong emotions, we're liable to fool ourselves." — Carl Sagan, A.D. 1934 - 1996, author of the book Cosmos and host of the related TV series.

With those words Mr. Sagan spoke well, for he spoke in accord with what Scripture teaches about mankind's great capacity for self deception. Example: when strong affection takes hold on a lover, the faults of the beloved one are minimized, often to the lover's eventual sorrow. That's when genuine love which never fails (1 Corinthians 13:8) comes to the aid of the genuine lover, who has not only great affection for but great commitment to the beloved!

Are not crimes of passion rightly so named, those deeds of violence from which the perpetrator would recoil in horror if his head were cooler? And many of us know by experience what Proverbs 26:12 declares, "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him." Oh the blinding power of pride!

Unwittingly, Mr. Sagan also spoke against his own perceptions and beliefs. Here is an example of Sagan's views, in which he passionately alludes to the teaching of our Lord with disdain:

"The idea that God is an oversized white male with a flowing beard who sits in the sky and tallies the fall of every sparrow is ludicrous. But if by God one means the set of physical laws that govern the universe, then clearly there is such a God. This God is emotionally unsatisfying...it does not make much sense to pray to the law of gravity."

Alas, Mr. Sagan! As you well know now, in whichever of the only two possible eternal estates is yours, you were fooling yourself when you spoke so foolishly of God the Father!

There can be a root cause of self deception deeper than our own passions. It is a dreadful one to consider, but it is revealed to us by Holy Spirit in His word at 2 Thessalonians 2:11 – "**And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie...**"

You didn't mistake that. The Bible says that GOD will send upon them a strong delusion! King Ahab was a notoriously wicked ruler who also despised God's word. In 1 Kings 22 we have a record of the vision of God's prophet Micaiah the son of Imlah, given to him just before Ahab goes into a battle at Ramoth Gilead in which Ahab's life will end. The prophet sees the LORD "sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left."

The LORD (*Who previously had uttered His righteous verdict against Ahab through the prophet Elijah, 1 Kings 21:17-19*), solicits the gathered host, saying "Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?" After some discoursing in the visionary courtroom, one lying spirit is given divine permission to go forth to persuade Ahab to do that which will lead to Ahab's own destruction. The passage concludes with these words which Micaiah spoke directly to the wicked king:

"Therefore look! **The LORD has put a lying spirit** in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the LORD has declared disaster against you." (1 Kings 22:23). A fearful sentence indeed!

Sometimes, as in cases like that of another king (Uzziah, 2 Chronicles 26) or like that of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), God arises to chastise in a spectacular way. More often, He gives people up to their own devices. He withholds the grace of repentance which He graciously gave to yet another king, Manasseh. The Judge of all the Earth allows self deception to prevail, and punishes impenitent sinners by sending those strong delusions upon them. (Ezekiel 20:25, Acts 7:42, Romans 1:24, 26)

In godly fear of the dread Sovereign Who is also our beloved, chastening Father, we do well to "...be doers of the word, and not hearers only, **deceiving yourselves.**" (James 1:22)