

Fool For Christ – Part 1 2 Corinthians 11:1-21 February 12, 2022



Have you ever had the ‘delight’ of finding yourself face to face with someone who has gone deep, deep down the rabbit hole of conspiracy theories?

A sovereign citizen. A flat-earther. A moon landing denier. A holocaust denier.

They are deep in a fantasy world of denial and deception. Truth seems a lie to them. What is clearly false seems unshakably real.

Frankly, it is not a pleasant experience. Rational argument, facts, even the evidence of their senses is not enough to break their delusion.

They have an answer to everything. The ‘authorities’ don’t want you to know the truth. ‘Someone’ with inside knowledge has shared the truth. Some event that ‘must be more than coincidence’ confirms to them they are right. Any evidence that contradicts their beliefs are ignored.

A lot of work has been done on this phenomenon. Slick, powerful lies backed by a whole community reinforcing this new truth seems to rewire the way they think.

Their minds have been messed with. Black becomes white. Even if it affects their lives, their families – even if it means doing something that would send them to prison – they will cling to it because it is truth.

So, how do you get through to them?

The best success seems to have come from getting a deprogrammer to take them away, cut them off from the internet and work slowly through each delusion. But, even that has limited success.

But there is one other chance – it is dangerous – and usually doesn't work.

You can enter into their world of delusion – find how they think, what they rely on for their authority – and try to co-opt that authority.

If they believe the moon-landing didn't happen because some authority in the world of conspiracy theories declares – it didn't happen – then one approach might be to find an even more well-known conspiracist, sovereign citizen – someone with credentials they trust – who is willing to vouch that yeah the moon landing did happen – and the real real the truth is – the elites realised publicising it was a mistake and now they want to keep it a secret.

Frankly, this kind of thing is distasteful, risky and rarely ends well. Entering into that world feels a little dirty, a lot deceitful and always runs the risk you end up going down the rabbit hole.

But if the stakes are high enough and there are no other options – that might just be what you must try.

This is the situation Paul finds himself in because the stakes couldn't be higher.

Some men came to his beloved church in Corinth and messed with their minds.

They came and preached another Jesus – one who finds power in strength not weakness – one who says the real gospel gives you heaven in this life.

They were adamant – God had spoken to them in visions – and sent them with the real truth.

And a group in the church were totally deceived by this. Rational argument couldn't shake their delusion.

Throughout this book Paul has presented the credentials of a true shepherd – **crucified leadership**.

I told you I want to sum up this book this way:



A saint with character shaped through adversity is a saint God can use.

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In this book, Paul gives the Corinthians and us a long series of:



Marks of crucified leadership.

Leadership in the church is not like leadership in the world.

The head of the church is a crucified Saviour so the leaders of His church must exhibit crucified leadership.

1:1-2 God's church - God's leaders

Marks of Crucified Leadership

1:3-11	Mark 1: Suffering	7:2-16	Mark 9: Joy
1:12-2:4	Mark 2: Godliness	8:1-24	Mark 10: Tester
2:5-2:11	Mark 3: Forgiver	9:1-9:15	Mark 11: Exhorter
2:12-3:6	Mark 4: Death	10:1-18	Mark 12: Humble
3:7-3:18	Mark 5: Life		
4:1-18	Mark 6: Endurance		
5:1-6:2	Mark 7: Ambassador		
6:3-7:1	Mark 8: Forthrightness		

But these credentials were not enough.

So, this morning we come to the **thirteenth** mark:

1:1-2 God's church - God's leaders

Marks of Crucified Leadership

1:3-11	Mark 1: Suffering	7:2-16	Mark 9: Joy
1:12-2:4	Mark 2: Godliness	8:1-24	Mark 10: Tester
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2:12-3:6	Mark 4: Death	10:1-18	Mark 12: Humble
3:7-3:18	Mark 5: Life	11:1-21	Mark 13: Jealous
4:1-18	Mark 6: Endurance		
5:1-6:2	Mark 7: Ambassador		
6:3-7:1	Mark 8: Forthrightness		

Jealous

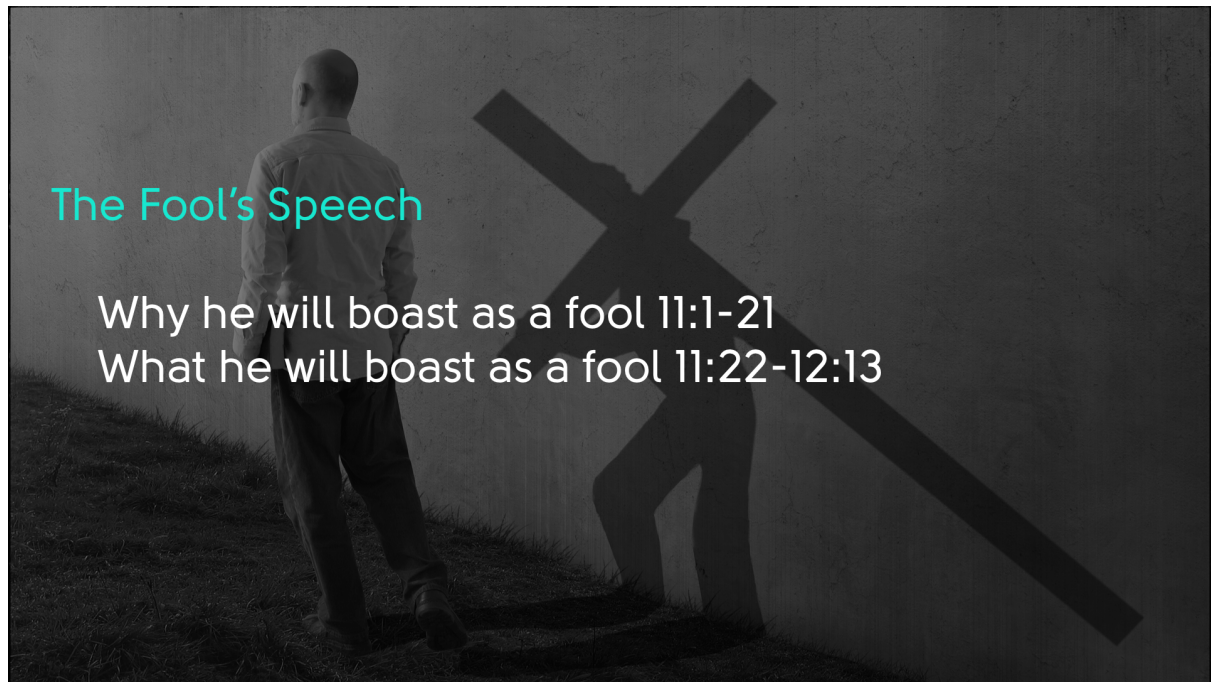
A jealous leader will go to amazing extremes for the flock.

To understand this mark – you need to grasp that our passage this week and our passage next week go together.

Together they form what is usually called – ‘**The Fool’s Speech.**’

Basically, Paul says – I have tried everything else – so now – if that is what it will take – I am going to resort to speaking as a fool.

Here is the structure of **The Fool’s Speech.**



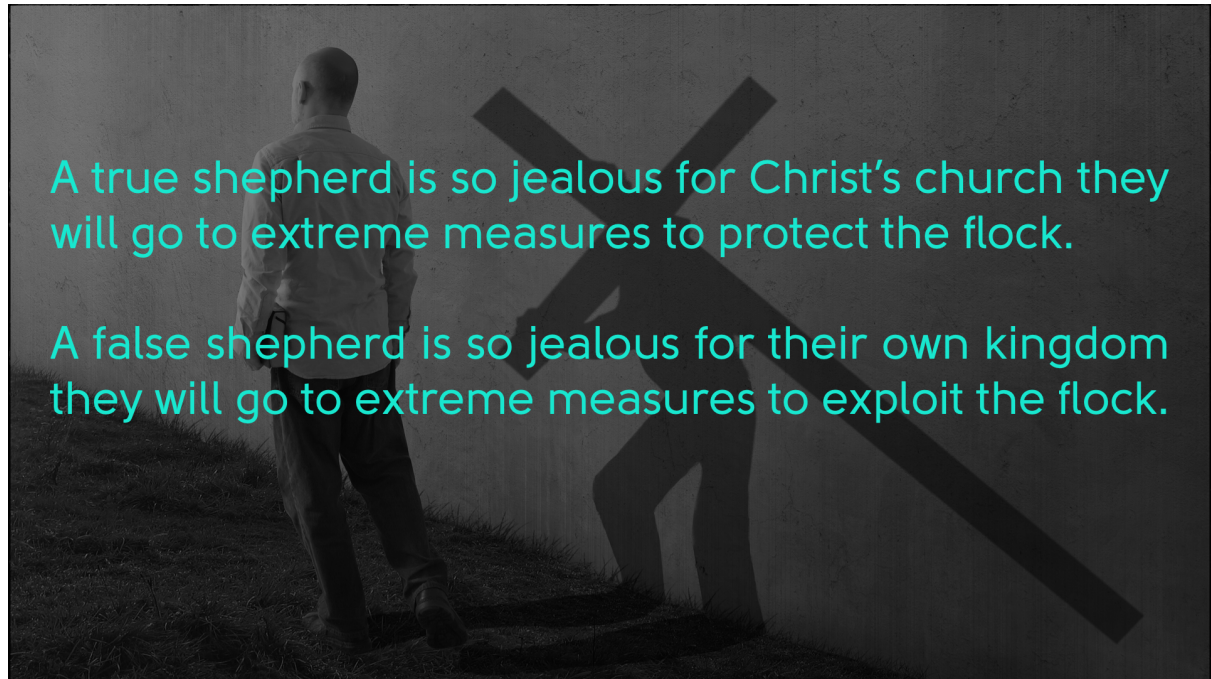
Why he will boast as a fool 11:1-21

What he will boast as a fool 11:22-12:13

This morning we will see that Paul is going to spend **21 verses** defending his decision to enter into the folly of the Corinthians.

It is such a radical step – Paul is clearly uncomfortable doing it – so he feels the need to explain why he will do something so distasteful.

Here is our point for this morning:



A true shepherd is so jealous for Christ's church they will go to extreme measures to protect the flock.

A false shepherd is so jealous for their own kingdom they will go to extreme measures to exploit the flock.

A true shepherd is so jealous for Christ's church they will go to extreme measures to protect the flock.

A false shepherd is so jealous for their own kingdom they will go to extreme measures to exploit the flock.

Here is what is so stunning about this. You would think one group screams – true shepherd and one screams wolf.

But their deception is so deep and profound they rejected the true shepherd and invited these wolves who were abusing them to become their leaders.

So – in a last effort to protect the flock – Paul will do something he loathes – boast about himself.

Thank the Lord, I have never had to do this.

There have been rare times over the years when I have had to point to a wolf and say – wolf.

In every instance the church just said – yeah we agree – that is a wolf.

But, if the church – or a significant part of the church – was deceived by the wolf – then reluctantly – I would have to consider doing something I would hate.

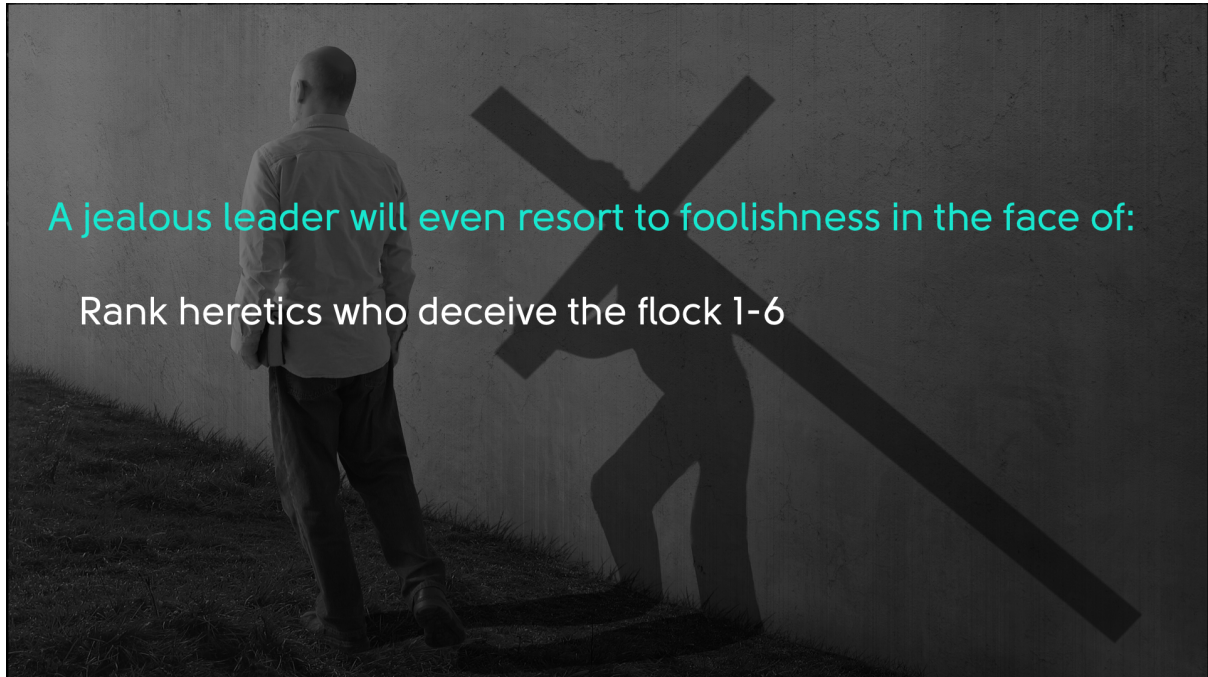
Resort to boasting about my credentials – why I am the true shepherd – why the church should heed me when I say – that is a wolf.

I think I could make a good case why I have earned the right to say – trust me – that is a wolf – but making that case would be beyond distasteful and I hope you make me have to do it.

In these 21 verses, Paul makes his case for going to extremes in *two points*.

First:

A jealous leader will even resort to foolishness in the face of:



Rank heretics who deceive the flock 1-6

If the deception is heresy. By that I mean, if those who follow it will be led away from Christ and eternity – **then** you do whatever it takes.

Look with me at 2 Corinthians 11:1:

I wish you would put up with a little foolishness from me. Yes, do put up with me!

I am going to be foolish – I hate it – but it is necessary – so put up with me.

Don't mistake what Paul is doing here.

He is reluctantly being forced to enter into the realm of folly to save his sheep.

He is going to answer these fools according to their folly.

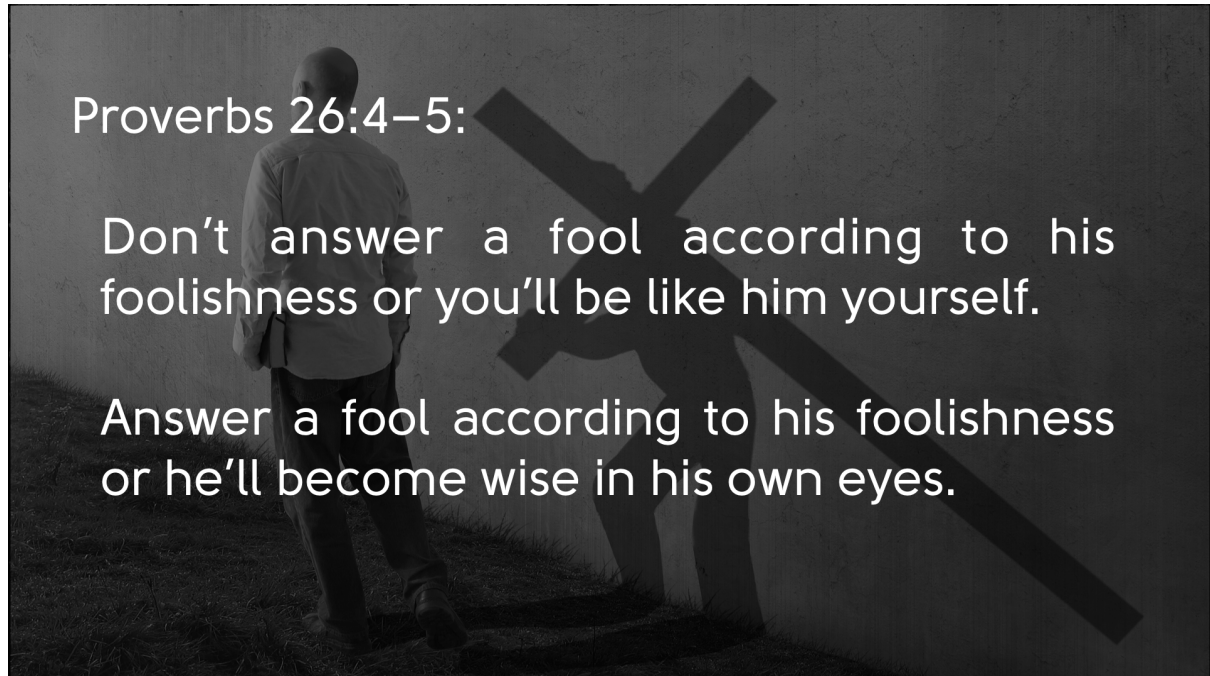
But big warning. Proverbs 26:1-12 tells us this is **not** something you should rush to do because it is near useless to argue with a fool. It ends with verse 12:

Do you see a person who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

You have more hope of getting through to a proud man than a fool – wow!

Reason, common sense, logic – won't cut it.

But, the key is found in verses 4-5:



Don't answer a fool according to his foolishness or you'll be like him yourself.

Answer a fool according to his foolishness or he'll become wise in his own eyes.

Honestly, even these verses might sound a little foolish.

Is he saying to answer a fool according to his foolishness or not?

The reality is – it is incredibly hard to answer a fool. It is frustrating and usually fruitless.

They are so taken in by deception that foolishness seems like wisdom to them. Their minds are messed with and they can't see their error.

Here is what you need to understand – verse 4 is the norm – don't even try and get into an argument with a fool. They are so deceived that it ends in frustration and you find yourself arguing like a fool. It is fruitless.

But if the situation is extreme – if it is the only possible hope – as a last resort – then maybe try verse 5. *Answer a fool according to his folly.*

In a few cases – if you can find the source of the fool's delusion you can commandeer it.

Why did the Corinthians trust the super apostles?

Because they thought the super apostle's worldly credentials were better than Paul's spiritual ones. They seemed more apostolic – more sent from Godish.

But Paul's worldly credentials were actually pretty good.

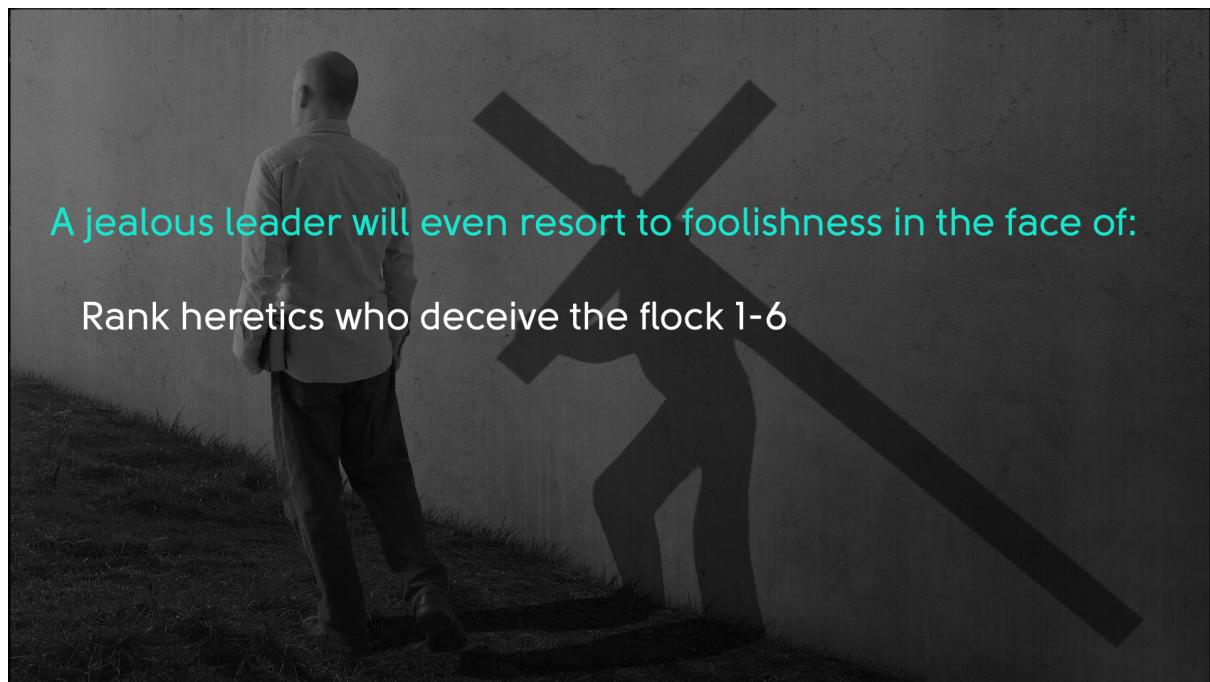
Next week beginning in verse 22 – Paul will give his worldly boast – lay out his worldly credentials.

Whatever they have – I have more.

If an angel came and spoke to them – well I actually went to heaven to receive my vision.

This is foolish stuff. Whose vision is more spectacular! That is not how you tell a true shepherd.

So, why does he do it? Because zeal for the flock compels him.



Verse 2:

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, because I have promised you in marriage to one husband—to present a pure virgin to Christ.

Dads with a daughter – I want you to picture your daughter for a moment.

You have loved her, poured your heart into her, prayed for her, raised her in the faith – and you are so proud of her.

Now she is 25 – and one Saturday dinner – she brings a guy along – and announces:

Hey family – this is Stan – and he is 'the one'. We plan to get married.

Stan is a good-looking guy – until he opens his mouth.

All he talks about is himself – how great he is – how he is going to do great things for God – and how his mother thinks your daughter is so fortunate to have met him.

And your Dad-radar starts going berserk.

You ask him – so – Stan – tell me your testimony. And basically, it is that at 16 God spoke to him – and tell him that he had great gifts and God wanted to do great things through him.

He mentions that he doesn't want kids – he will be too busy for that. He wants to be in a financial position to retire at 30 – and thinks becoming Prime Minister might be a way the country can be blessed by his gifts.

And as he is talking you realise this guy might have chiselled abs and a square chin – but he is entirely vacuous and a spiritual fraud.

You are wondering – where did I go wrong – how on earth could a daughter of mine fall for a chump like this?

So, you promise yourself – you will go to any lengths to open your daughter's eyes to who this guy is.

If you understand that – then you understand the Apostle Paul.

As a shepherd – he loved this church. His role is to get them to the marriage supper of the lamb holy and pure ready to be wedded to Christ.

But some wolves have turned up, deceived them and led them away from truth and godliness – and crucially – away from Christ. If he does not succeed, they will be lost – eternally.

Paul will have none of this.

Now, just pause for a minute. This church had caused Paul so much trouble. It had divided, rejected his leadership, reneged on commitments.

There had to be a part of Paul that said – fine – you want these guys – well don't say I didn't warn you. Reap the whirlwind. You deserve each other.

But, Paul couldn't do that. He loved them with a jealous zeal to see them wedded to Christ. He will go to any lengths for them.

Every church has some difficult members. Some who are divisive and abrasive, some who hold some weird views and even more who drive you nuts.

But here is the thing – they are blood bought sheep.

A false shepherd says – unless I can exploit them they are not worth the effort.

A true shepherd says – I will do whatever I can to see them seated at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Verse 3:

But I fear that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your minds may be seduced from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

It is stunning to reflect on the deception of Eve.

She was created by God to reign over the entire world by Adam's side. She was placed in a world that was very good – no death, illness, division. Paradise.

God told her and Adam – what the truth was.

But, some random serpent turns up and says – Oh Eve honey – all you got was Paradise? – Oh you deserve so much more.

Listen did God tell you that you can't have that tree? So, He didn't even give you the whole world! God is holding out on you. What kind of love is that?

Here is the 'true' truth – eating from that tree will make you like God. You deserve to be like God.

You have to ask – what could ever possess Eve to trust this random serpent over the Creator who had blessed her so much?

Deception.

She was deceived. Something in her wanted to believe this.

So, she chose Satan's words over God's.

She chose Satan's false promises over the beautiful reality she had before her.

Now the Corinthians had the same choices.

Paul had preached the true Christ. They knew the beauty of knowing God and the glory of salvation.

But these men turned up and said – really? Just salvation – you deserve so much more.

Trust us – you can have a higher spiritual life – healing, wealth, power – and they trusted them over Paul the Apostle who led them to Christ.

D. A. Carson puts it this way:

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From the time of the Fall to the present day, men and women have frequently succumbed to the deceptive devices of the devil. Christians are especially open to the kind of cunning deceit that combines the language of faith and religion with the content of self-interest and flattery. We like to be told how special we are, how wise, how blessed.... We like to have our Christianity shaped less by the cross than by triumphalism or rules or charismatic leaders or subjective experience. And if this shaping can be coated with assurances of orthodoxy, complete with cliché, we may not detect the presence of the arch-deceiver, nor see that we are being weaned away from "sincere and pure devotion to Christ" to a "different gospel."

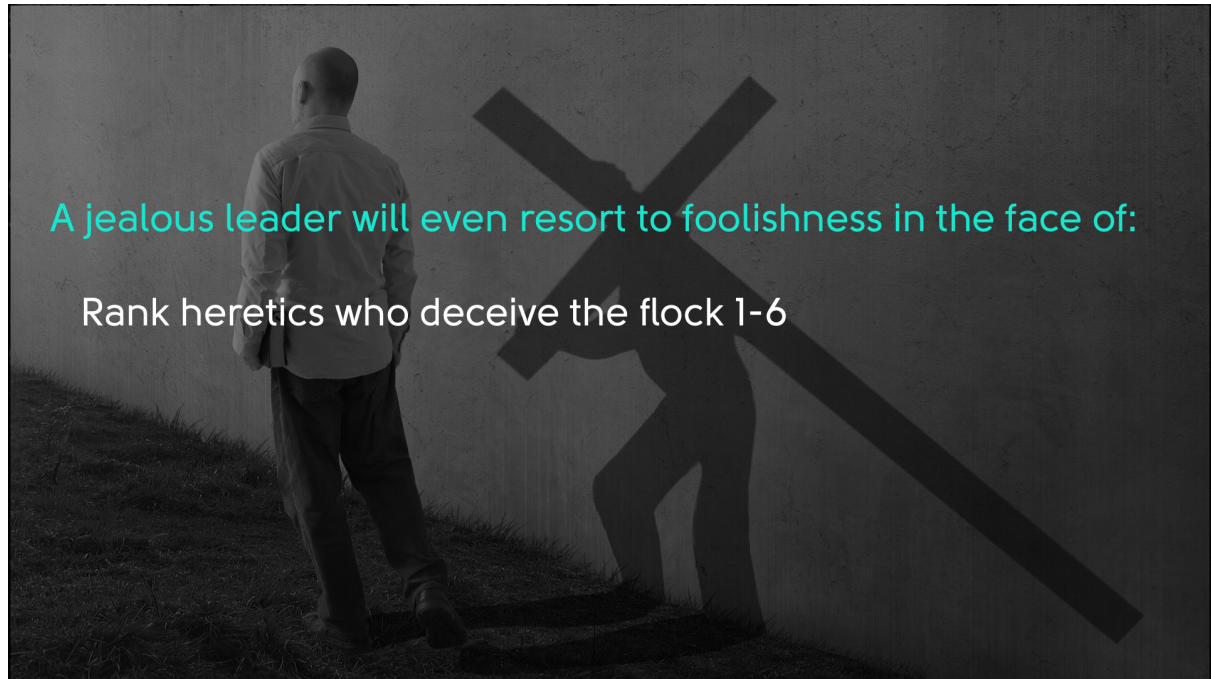
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The true gospel is glorious – but life is still tough.

So, a false gospel that promises heaven in this life – and comes with assurances that this is the true gospel – just trust me – this is incredibly attractive.

But – if you believe it – you leave a sincere and pure devotion to Christ and join these wolves on the road to hell.

¹ Donald A. Carson, *From Triumphalism to Maturity, a New Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10–13* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), p. 86.



Verse 4:

For if a person comes and preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you had not received, or a different gospel, which you had not accepted, you put up with it splendidly!

The wolves came to this church – not with horns – but in sheep’s clothing.

They looked genuine, they quoted Scripture, they told the saints that God sent them and they promised a better Jesus, a better Spirit based on a better gospel.

They messed with their heads.

This is the heart of what drove Paul to act like a fool.

Five – six – years earlier – Paul had come to Corinth – preached a crucified Jesus – and those who accepted this Jesus received the salvation given by the Spirit based on the true gospel.

But after Paul left, some very different men arrived with a very different message.

They preached a *different* Jesus.

Remember back in 1 Corinthians 12:3 – these false teachers came with a teaching that fitted well with their Greek background saying – flesh is bad.

God would not come in the flesh! Paul should not have taught you that.

Most likely they taught something like this. The Christ – who is Spirit – took over the body of the fleshly man – Jesus – but departed before the cross. Only the fleshly man Jesus suffered the curse of the cross.

So, in 1 Corinthians 12 – when said – Jesus is cursed – incredibly the church applauded.

This teaching fit the ethos of the age – but it changed the whole doctrine of the incarnation and the atonement. It denied the truth that Jesus was the God man who came and died on the cross – doctrines at the very heart of the gospel.

So, the Spirit they received – was not the Holy Spirit that saves.

And they taught a false gospel of easy believism and a belief that the glories of heaven are ours in this life.

These men did not just get things a bit wrong.

This is a false Jesus, Spirit and gospel.

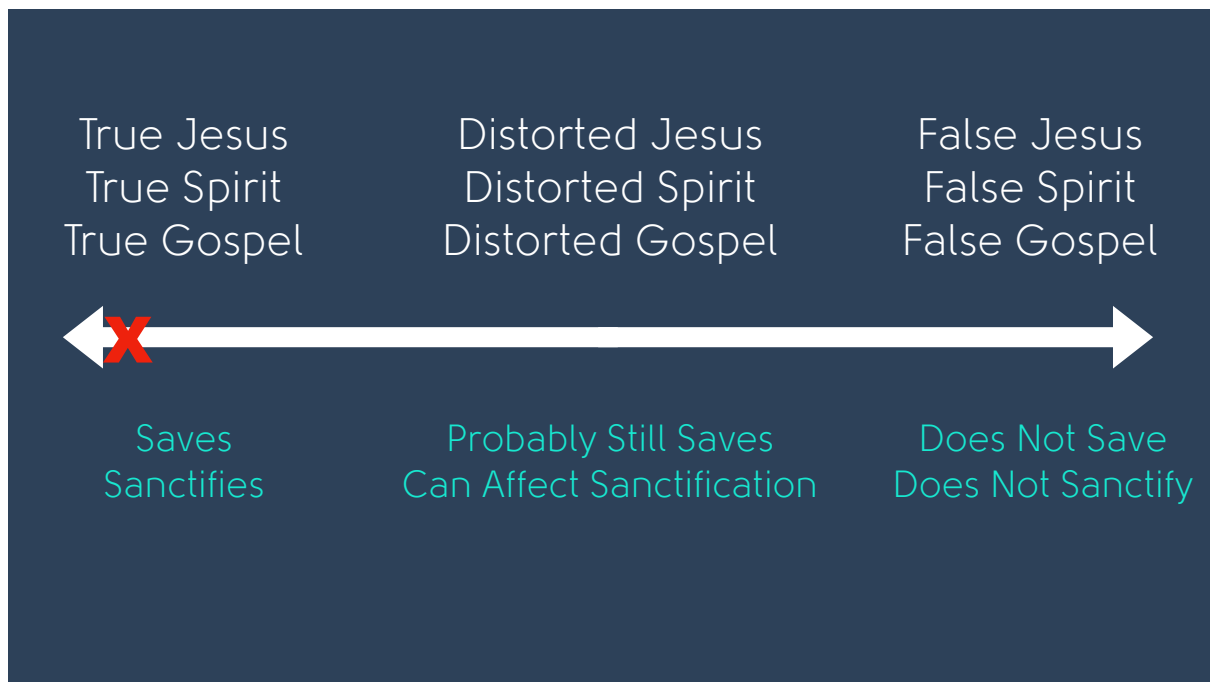
Over the centuries church councils and creeds have sought to define the true Jesus and true gospel that leads to receiving the true Spirit.

Let me assure you that it is not as easy as it might seem.

When you read the Bible, it seems clear that there is a spectrum of truth about Jesus and the gospel.



I want to suggest – that there is a pure, true gospel.



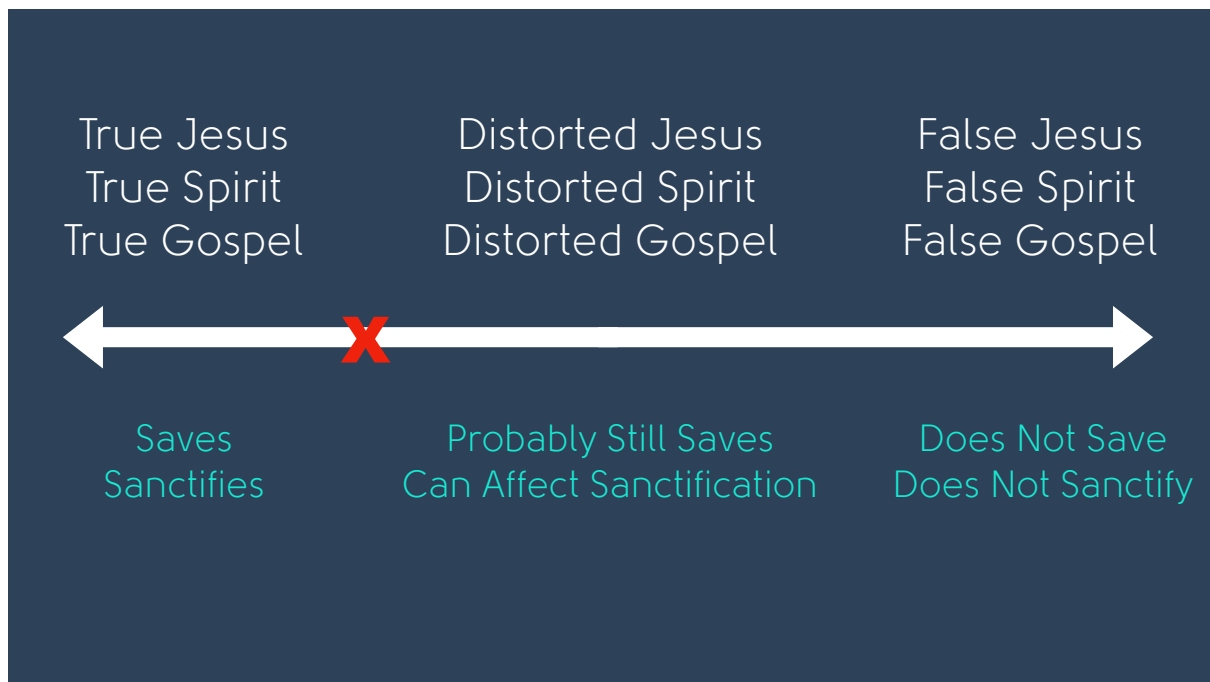
If Jesus and the Apostles were to give the gospel and tell us about Jesus – I believe this is what they would say.

Jesus is God, one person of the Trinity. In the incarnation He became fully man and fully God. He lived a perfect life. He died a substitutionary death and rose again on the third day. He will come again for His people to live with them for all eternity in the new heavens. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.

This is the truth that saves.

You have to believe these core truths to be saved.

But there are some associated teachings about Jesus and the gospel – not core ones – and unfortunately, sin, pride, folly means none of us gets everything right.



When you move away from core truths – some doctrines are debateable.

Was Jesus not able to sin – or able not to sin?

Exactly how much of His divine attributes were laid aside in the incarnation?

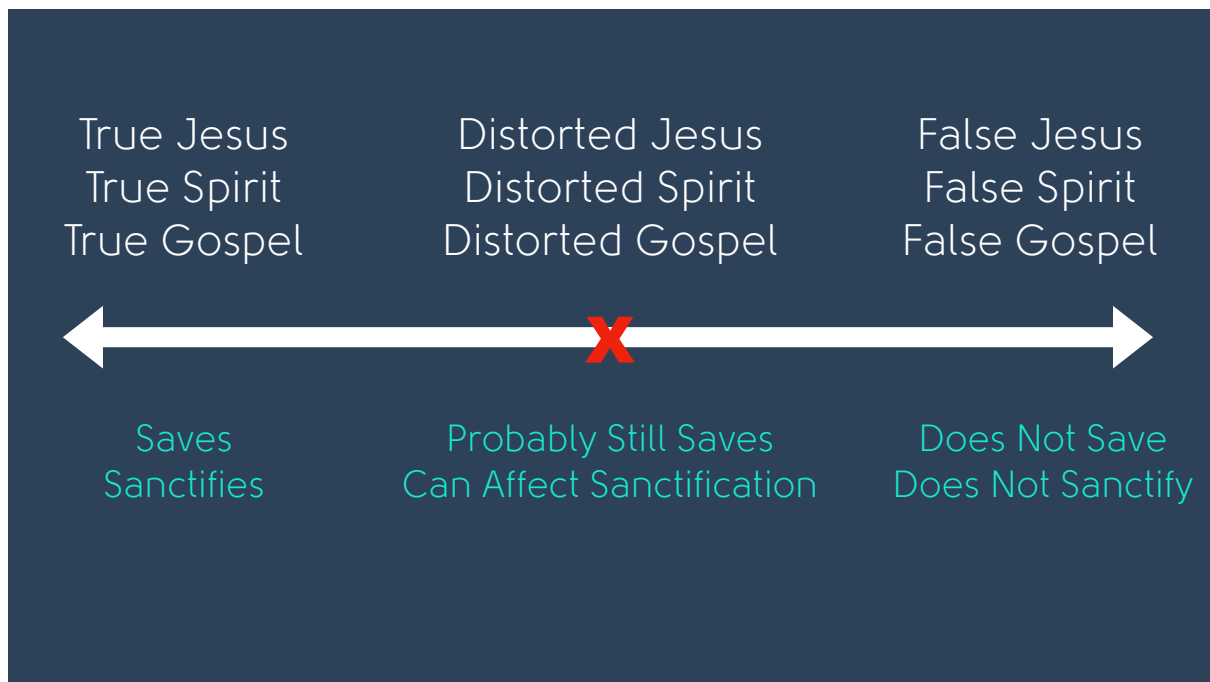
Did He die for the elect or for the whole world?

Don't get me wrong – these areas are important to discuss and search out – but they are **not** core to the gospel or to how we live.

Even if you end up on the wrong side of these – holding them will not banish you to hell. **And** – teaching these things does not make someone a wolf.

This is within the realm of orthodoxy and we are all still brothers and sisters.

But, the further from the truth you get – the more distorted Jesus, the Spirit and the gospel become.



The core Jesus can still be there – but in important – but not core areas – He is not the real Jesus of the Bible.

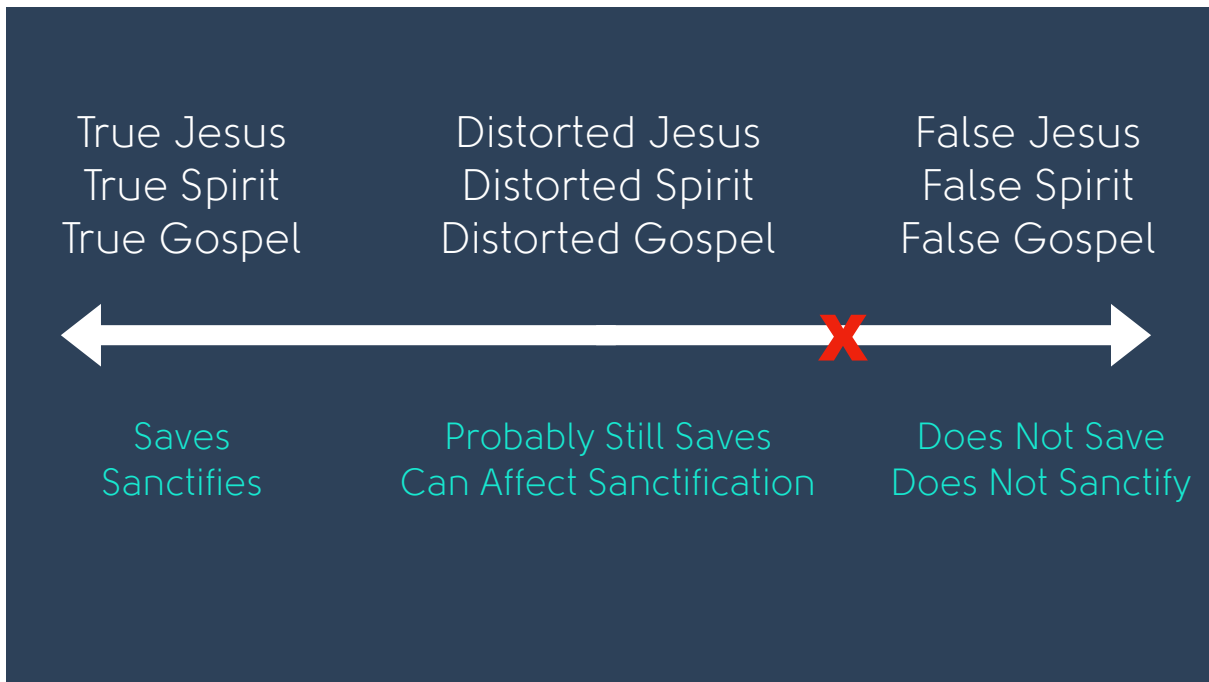
A Jesus who promises that healing in this life is part of the atonement.

A gospel that leads to prosperity and power.

A Jesus who asks for no sacrifice and cross bearing.

Distorted yes, but as long as the core Jesus has not changed – can this gospel still save? Yes – but it often leads to a life that is not holy and Christlike.

But that all changes if you move any further.



There comes a point where the core Jesus and gospel changes.

A Jesus who died as an example – not as a substitutionary atonement.

A Jesus who came to take everyone ever born to heaven.

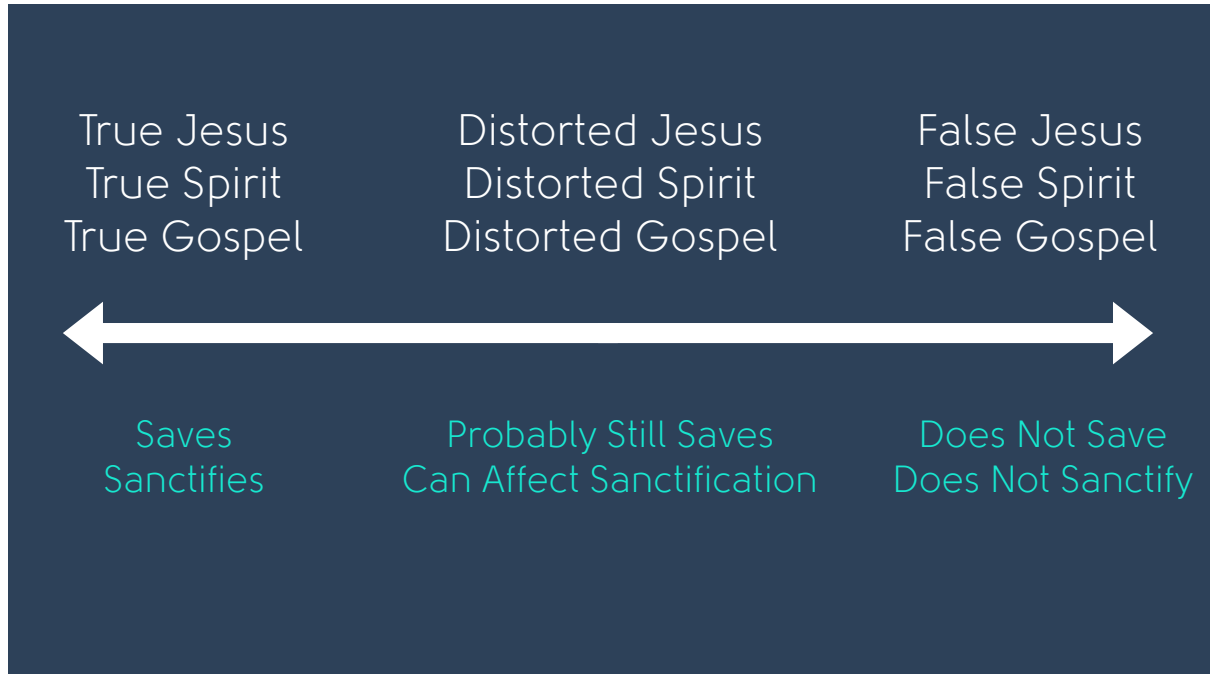
This has become not just a *distorted* Jesus but a *false* Jesus.



Keep going and eventually you reach a Jesus – that you would think everyone would say – that is clearly a false Jesus.

The Jesus taught by the Unitarian Church – that He was just a man, just a good teacher.

Or the Jesus of liberalism – not born of a virgin, did not rise again and is not returning. Probably He never actually existed.



I want to say **four things** about this.

1. Our depravity is so strong, we can be deceived into believing a clearly false Jesus and false gospel.

A Unitarian, a Mormon, a JW – to them they can see their Jesus in the pages of the New Testament. Nothing will convince them that Jesus is God.

They will defend their Jesus. Their deception is deep.

But, do not think for a moment that any of us are immune from this level of deception.

2. Determining when a distorted Jesus becomes a false Jesus is incredibly hard.

I suspect if we opened that topic up to debate in this church – which we won't – we would have some strong opinions as to what teaching falls on what side.

So, my plea is – don't linger anywhere except way up around the true gospel and true Jesus. Be Bereans.

3. The accusation that something is a false gospel is often inappropriately weaponised.

There are some who are adamant that if you disagree with their view of some secondary teaching – end times, or creation, or inerrancy – you have accepted a false gospel.

Look, it is possible these things can be associated with a false gospel. It is possible that the hermeneutic and thinking could lead to a false gospel.

But they are usually not directly linked.

Holding a view in these areas that is different from yours does not mean they have to be labelled a heretic.

If they do hold to a false gospel – show why it is a different Jesus or gospel. Don't say – well all postmill will eventually become liberals and deny the incarnation.

That is wrong.

Don't turn a debated issue into a salvation issue.

For example – I personally hold to a six-day, young earth creation.

But my blood boils when men like John Piper and Benjamin Warfield are accused of holding to '*another gospel*' simply because they have a different view of creation. That is cheap, unbiblical and needs to be called out.

4. It is the role of true shepherds to discern as accurately as possible the true Jesus, Spirit and gospel – and to call our people to hold tenaciously to these core truths.

If they are following a distortion – teach them and guide them to truth.

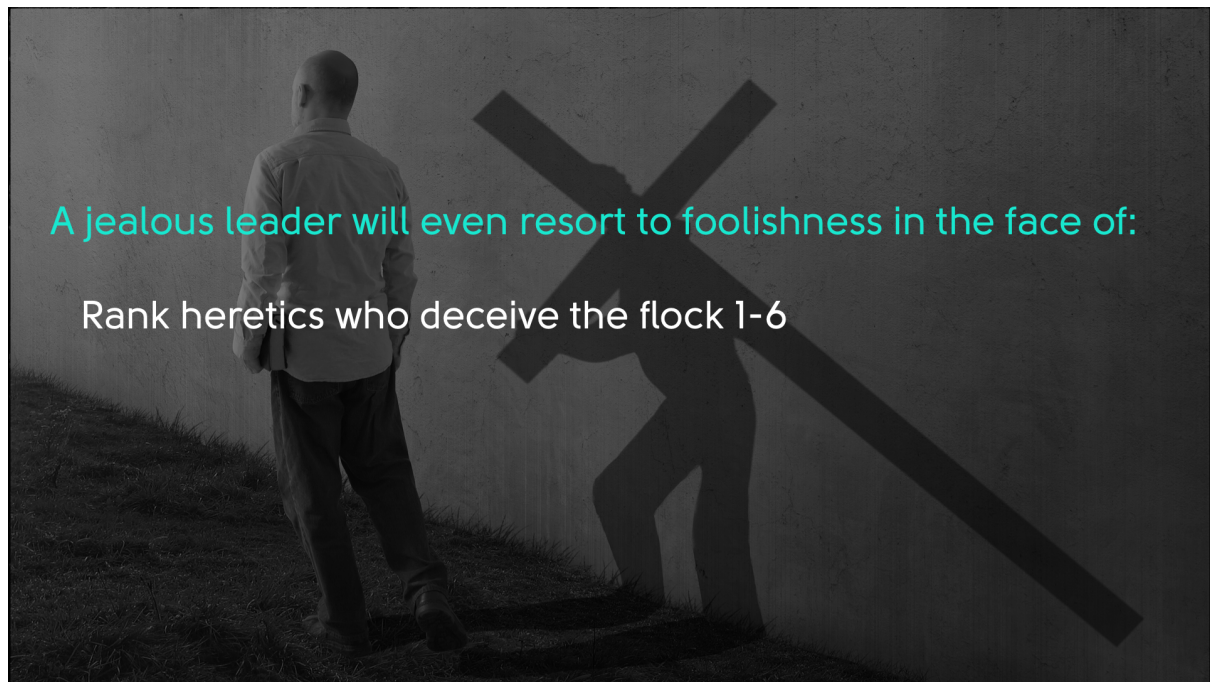
But if they are being lured by a false Jesus and gospel – you do whatever it takes to shake them of that delusion because eternity is at stake.

That is Paul. That is why he is willing to enter into their folly in the hope of rescuing them.

These false apostles did not just teach a distorted Jesus and gospel – they were teaching a false Jesus and gospel.

And a part of the church in Corinth had put up with it splendidly!

They had fallen for a lie straight from the pit of hell.



Look at verses 5-6:

Now I consider myself in no way inferior to those “super-apostles.” Even if I am untrained in public speaking, I am certainly not untrained in knowledge. Indeed, we have in every way made that clear to you in everything.

These guys were self-styled “super apostles” – they said they had knowledge beyond a regular Apostle like Paul.

Paul says – actually my knowledge and my gospel is in no way inferior to these wolves.

Maybe I don’t speak with fancy rhetoric – but I tell you I have been trained in the truth.

Don’t think that Paul was saying he was a poor public speaker. He was trained under Gamaliel. Paul’s speeches in Acts are brilliant.

I think Paul could have spoken with the best going around.

What he is saying is he *chose* not to. He chose to let the pure gospel win them to Christ – not his powers of persuasion.

Their salvation was to rest on the gospel – not whether Paul was a powerful speaker.

Look there are gifted speakers on the internet that weave together – false logic, coincidences, add in a few supposed experts – and something false can seem true.

Paul never resorted to that. He just preached Christ and Him crucified and left it to the Holy Spirit to convict.

Paul had always been clear – this was how he operated.

He knew the true gospel and would not budge an inch.

Brothers and sisters – modern communication and the internet have turned a few distortions about Jesus into a tsunami of distortions and the number of heresies floating around today is legion.

Pastors, Elders – but also fathers, mothers, Christians – our job is to sort through the morass.

What is the true Jesus, Spirit and gospel?

You have to find and join a church that teaches it – proclaims it – and you have to trust it for your eternal life.

And as a leader – we need to teach the truth without compromise.

We also need to say – OK – in some disputed areas – that is not what I teach – but those men and women are not wolves – they are brothers – we hold the same Jesus and same gospel.

We need to identify the distortions – and say – stay well clear – some are saved – some aren't – stay away.

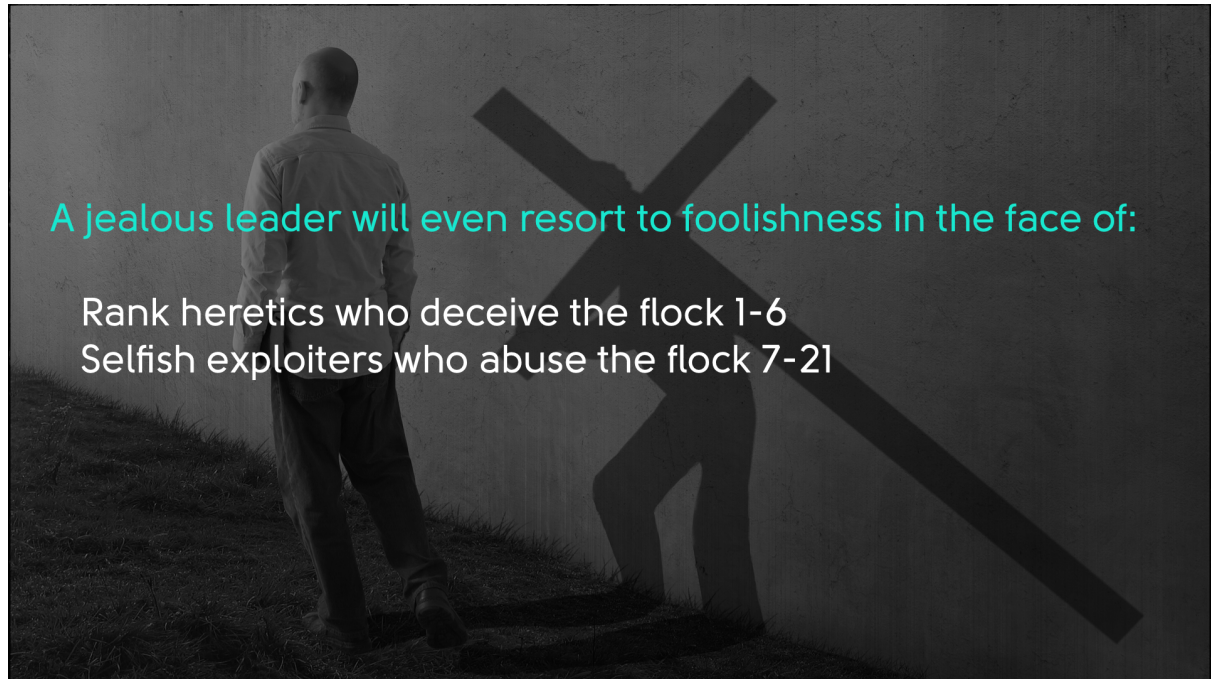
But when it gets to the level of a false gospel – then we need to unleash with all we have.

Call a wolf a wolf. Name the falsity in the gospel clearly.

And if necessary be willing to go to distasteful lengths like boasting.

So, first and foremost, Paul went to these lengths because these men were rank heretics.

But there is a **second** reason. They are:



Selfish exploiters who abuse the flock 7-21

You know they are wolves because they exploit the sheep.

Paul did everything he could to not even have an appearance of exploiting the flock – but these men were brazen in exploiting the flock – and incredibly the flock said – Oh at last a real leader.

2 Corinthians 11:7–9:

Or did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by taking pay from them to minister to you. When I was present with you and in need, I did not burden anyone, since the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my needs. I have kept myself, and will keep myself, from burdening you in any way.

Greece had a long-standing tradition of philosophers, public speakers, rhetoricians – coming to a city – speaking in the public square and then being paid according to their ability.

Dud, boring speech – let them starve.

But, somebody comes and makes a brilliant speech – challenges you to think in new ways – then you pay them – well.

Great speakers on the circuit could earn really good money.

I received an email this week inviting me to go to Sydney or Melbourne to hear Barack Obama speak.

These are huge auditoriums – already nearly sold out. Tickets in the back rafters – \$295, decent seats cost \$895 and significantly more for the box seats.

My guess is tickets per night will net well over \$5,000,000 per speech. I'm not sure what the President's take is – but probably more than most of us make in 10 years of work.

Great work if you can get it.

Paul refused to take money from the Corinthians. He supported himself with some additional support from the Macedonians.

Why? He never wanted anyone to think he was there sharing the gospel for financial gain. The gospel comes free – never with a price tag.

Sharing the gospel is to cost you not the ones you share with.

Sharing the gospel is reward enough in itself.

But, the super apostles were not only willing to gouge the flock – they weaponised this.

Paul didn't charge because his gospel isn't worth anything. We know that ours is worth a lot.

Verses 10-11:

As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I don't love you? God knows I do!

Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus and received the truth – the gospel – it is in him.

He was sent to boast to the Gentiles.

To boast in Christ. To boast that if anyone placed their faith in Christ – Christ would pay for their sins and save them. And this incredible transaction comes at precisely no monetary cost. You cannot buy salvation – you can only receive it as a free gift.

If Paul took money for the gospel – it might distort his gospel – hinder his gospel – and Paul will not do that because he loves the sheep.

He will sacrifice for the sheep.

Verse 12:

But I will continue to do what I am doing, in order to deny an opportunity to those who want to be regarded as our equals in what they boast about.

I will keep doing this without payment from you – so that I can point out the absurdity of these men who claim to be our equals – but boast that their gospel is worth you paying them.

By not taking payment – I have earned the right to point out who they really are.

Verses 13-15:

For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no great surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will be according to their works.

They are not apostles – they are not sent from God.

Here is what they are. Deceivers sent by Satan. The word is derived from bait that deceives a fish into being hooked and losing its life.

They merely disguise themselves as apostles of Christ.

No wonder – because Satan comes disguised as an angel of light. Satan came to Eve as a divine authority coming to help her.

Satan doesn't turn up with horns and hoofs – he comes as an angel from God.

His servants – the ones doing his bidding don't come with horns and hoofs. They come looking like a preacher with an open Bible – like a servant of righteousness.

Joseph Smith – the prosperity teachers – the rank liberal ministers – they come saying they are doing the work of God – trust us.

But their end will be according to their works.

Their final judgment is sealed by their works – their fruit.

Their jealousy was for their own kingdom – not for the church – their actions led to exploiting the church not leading them closer to Christ.

Verses 16-18:

I repeat: Let no one consider me a fool. But if you do, at least accept me as a fool so that I can also boast a little. What I am saying in this matter of boasting, I don't speak as the Lord would, but as it were, foolishly. Since many boast according to the flesh, I will also boast.

I am going to do something foolish – but don't think I am a fool.

If you want to think of me as foolish – at least think of me as a fool for Christ – boasting in my credentials for good reason.

This is not how the Lord would have me boast – this is worldly foolish boasting – but because you seem to only accept worldly fleshly boasting – you have pushed me to do something I hate.

And here is why. Verses 19-20:

For you, being so wise, gladly put up with fools! In fact, you put up with it if someone enslaves you, if someone exploits you, if someone takes advantage of you, if someone is arrogant toward you, if someone slaps you in the face.

These false apostles came to Corinth.

They boasted like the world. We are awesome apostles and you are so blessed to have us.

They were unashamed to say we are in it for the money. They took advantage of the Corinthians.

They imposed a domineering leadership on the church.

They were so deceived it was as if someone turned up arrogantly treated them as nothing, slapped them in the face and they said – thank you – Ah that is a real leader.

It is like an abused woman who actually thinks they need the bully.

Verse 21:

I say this to our shame. We have been too weak for that! But in whatever anyone dares to boast—I am talking foolishly—I also dare.

What should we feel shame that we didn't treat you like that? So what, because we sacrificed we are weak and not true shepherds?

Well – if the only way to get through to you is to boast like a fool – then that is what I will do.

And from verse 22 – Paul gives his foolish boast – but that is next week.

But here is the picture in verses 1-21.

The true shepherd came – loved the sheep – treated them gently – asked nothing of them but gave sacrificially and did whatever it took to build them up.

And then wolves came. They said – we are different shepherds – better shepherds than Paul. Paul was too weak – we are strong. Strong leaders are worthy of respect, very generous support and your full obedience.

It is like the wolves turned up – began to chew a leg off a sheep – and fangs in its leg and with blood dripping down its leg – the sheep says – Oh thank you – you are so powerful you must be a real shepherd.

Paul says – that is how deceived you are – you let wolves abuse you and you thank them for it. But if you don't snap out of it – it will cost you eternity.

I have tried giving you the truth – I have tried leading by example – but you only seem to respond to folly – so if you need a strong leader – then I will boast – and pray you listen.

Brothers and sisters, I am unsure if these verses surprise you, shock you.

If you think – there is no way Satanic servants preaching a false gospel and exploiting the flock for personal gain could ever deceive a good church – then you have not followed church history.

Rank heresy.

There are so many accounts of really good churches – where a solid pastor dies or retires – and a new one comes and within a few short years – the church has turned from solid gospel to another Jesus.

Turn enough churches and a whole denomination apostatises.

Turn enough and the gospel light dims in a nation where it was once bright – look at Europe.

We turn to heresy so easily.

Selfish exploiters.

Surely anyone coming as a domineering, selfish, abuser would be called out by good churches?

No.

In the past decades we have seen the reality. Solid churches who idolised strong leaders while they abused the flock.

Titus 1:7 says an Elder must not be greedy for money.

We have so many examples of prominent pastors and leaders who fleece their flock – often relatively poor members – and live extravagant lifestyles. And the flock loves them and defends them.

1 Peter 5:3 says Elders must:

Not lord it over those entrusted to them, but be examples to the flock.

Hardly a week goes by when we don't hear of pastors – often good solid preachers – who dominated a flock, misused their power and the flock said thank you for being such a strong leader.

Shockingly, we have also seen in the last few years in really good churches and institutions – men in positions of power who used that influence to take advantage of women sexually – for years.

And those women put up with it – thinking they are a godly leader – somehow this must be OK. And other leaders covered it up – the good they are doing outweighs their shortcomings.

No no no!

Angels of light – who look impressive, sound impressive – but deceive and abuse the flock.

Look, I would never say the Elders and Pastors here are perfect – I will never say we have every doctrine nailed.

But I will say – we do our best to strive to preach the truth and defend you from wolves.

And just as Jesus did what it took for His flock – laying down His life for the sheep – if the need arises – I trust we will do what it takes to protect you from wolves – heretics and abusers.

Perhaps even having to act a little foolishly to reach some who aren't even aware they are being deceived.

This stuff is not fantasy it happens.

Some of you have family members in churches like that. Being fed doctrines that are at best distorted and often veer towards false.

Being abused, manipulated, taken advantage of – but they can't see it – and defend their abusers vehemently.

What do you do?

There is no Paul who can go in to boast of his credentials and gain their trust.

So, you pray – you ask the Lord to open their eyes.

You love them and care for them and maintain the relationship with them.

You keep pointing them to Scripture and the true Jesus, the true Spirit and the true gospel.

You live a life of holiness and Christlikeness – so that if and when the day comes – you can boast of the true gospel and true Jesus – and God in His mercy may lead them to truth.

And you do everything in your power to know the true Jesus and gospel and never depart from it.

Fool For Christ – Part 1

2 Corinthians 11:1-21 February 12, 2022

Main Point:

A true shepherd is so jealous for Christ's church they will go to extreme measures to protect the flock.

A false shepherd is so jealous for their own kingdom they will go to extreme measures to exploit the flock.

General Questions:

1. Whether it is conspiracies, the gospel or something else – why do you think some people are just blind to an obvious truth?
2. Why did zeal drive Paul to do something he felt was foolish?
3. How could Eve fall for the lies of the serpent? How could the Corinthians fall for the lies of these super apostles?
4. What do you have to believe about Jesus and the gospel for it to be a gospel that can actually save someone?
5. Why are some deceived by a gospel that doesn't seem to match up with Scripture?
6. How is it possible for a church to have an abusive, selfish leader and think they have a strong godly leader? Why does exploiting the sheep make some think this is actually a strong godly leader?
7. What marks a man out as an exploitative leader?
8. What marks a man out as a true shepherd?
9. Why have so many churches allowed wolves into leadership?

Application Questions:

1. What can you do to ensure you are holding to the true Jesus and gospel?
2. What can members do to make sure their shepherds are not wolves and abusers?
3. What can you do for a family member who is in an unhealthy church?