



# GRACE CHURCH

## Sincere and Pure Devotion

2 Corinthians 11:1-15

Grace Church | 2.8.20

Good morning church. I wanted to remind us quickly, and to reiterate if you are a visitor with us, of our goal this morning. We are a church who wholeheartedly believe in the necessity of *divine revelation*. To put it simply, we need to see Jesus, who is the perfect revelation of God. The real Jesus, no substitutes. And in order to see him and know him today, we have to come on his terms. So our goal today is to walk away from our time in the word with a sincere love for Jesus Christ, and our text today will help us do that. I'd also remind you that that commitment doesn't end on Sunday morning. The primary way we make Jesus known to one another is through our shared life, which we participate in through our community groups. These groups meet weekly in the homes of members with the goal of making disciples of Jesus. So if you are new and want more information about our church or how to get connected and welcomed into a group where you can meet our church, come find me or a pastor or head over to the big table in the lobby that says "connect" over it, and we can help you do that.

Speaking of sincere and pure love for the real Jesus, that is what our text is all about today. In our time in 2 Corinthians, we have watched as the apostle Paul has laid out the truth of the gospel as a paradox: it's shown not in our outward strength, but in our weakness. We carry the glory of God in our fragile clay pot lives, precisely so that we can act as effective ambassadors of God's message to humanity. The whole goal of our ministry as Christians is that we would look unimpressive so the message we carry would be all that more impressive. Less of us, more of Jesus. We show this in how we act with eternity in mind, in how we give our resources, in how we care for and comfort one another. All of this models Jesus, who became weak and poor for our sake and who displayed his strength most potently at the cross when he appeared the weakest.

But following Jesus into that kind of sacrifice, the laying down of our own lives so that Jesus looks big, isn't compelling to the natural man. It's not attractive. And Paul knows this: so as he lays out his case for the paradox of the gospel, he isn't naive to the fact that he will have opposition. He has already heard of how the Corinthians are being taught *not* to trust and believe his gospel message. And Keith showed us last week that Paul's main opposition is these self-proclaimed apostles who come in with polished oratory skill and flourish and boast in themselves. But Paul isn't like that. When he boasts, it's not according to the flesh. He summarizes his position, which last week we called "humble boldness", in chapter **10:17-18**.



And so as Paul begins to set himself up against his opponents, he does not pull punches. It's not as if he is writing a nice little letter to warn the Corinthians about some teachers who are overall really great but who he has some small concerns about. No, Paul is deeply concerned. We see the height of his concern in **verses 3** of our text.

You see, Paul knows the power of deception. For him, it's rooted in man's heart from the beginning. He knows that the fall of man into sin was due to the crafty, *cunning* words of Satan. We are all the offspring of Eve, who was tricked into questioning the truth of God's character, and we are all the offspring of Adam, who sat back and partook in sin with an evil and apathetic curiosity. That was the bend of the heart of the Corinthians, and it is the bend of our hearts today. The natural state of our **thoughts** is crookedly angled towards believing lies about God.

And listen up church: this is very serious. By nature of the world we live in, we are in danger of a slow drift from sincerity and purity to double-mindedness and becoming deceivers ourselves. So Paul is rightfully concerned about the Corinthians. Let's dive into a little more what it means to have this "sincere and pure devotion" to Christ in verses 1-3, then we will draw two warnings for ourselves from the text of the text.

## **Paul's Fear: Deception Away from Devotion (1-3)**

Notice first Paul's language and how he sets up our text. **Read verse 1.** If you remember from last week, Keith appropriately pointed out that starting in chapter 10, Paul makes a fairly dramatic turn in tone and content in 2 Corinthians. Up to this point the defense of his ministry has been fairly gentle, but the last three chapters, 10-13 show us Paul doubling down on his heart for the Corinthians. He cannot stand idly by why they are deceived, so he is willing to say whatever it takes to warn them and wake them up to the danger they are flirting with. This is what he means in **verse 1**. It's likely that Paul's opponents have accused him of being foolish and unwise because of his lack of bravado. They are comparing themselves to Paul, and were not outright rebuking Paul as a false apostle, but rather as a "less-than" apostle. So the language of Paul's opponents to the Corinthians would have been that they must "bear with Paul". You've heard that language, when you are trying to convince someone to be patient with someone. But it can often be degrading, as it is in this case. "Oh Paul? He's a bit of a fool, just bear with him".

And rather than boast in himself as being better in some way than his opponents, Paul turns their language against them. He plays their game, but by different rules. He is saying: "You have heard that I am a fool? You've been asked to bear with me? Well then go ahead and bear with me for a bit longer, because if I must be a fool in your eyes, so be it!" This is an echo in some way of the same language he has used before, in chapter 5:12-13

We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about



what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

In other words, Paul is willing to do whatever it takes: even if he is seen as crazy, he knows the truth, and he wants the Corinthians to see it clearly too. This idea is strengthened when we look at **verse 2**. The kind of jealousy that Paul feels for the Corinthians is the same kind of jealousy God feels for his children. God is jealous for all those in Christ, he will not tolerate the worship of another. And this is how Paul feels: he cannot stand to see the Corinthians forsaking him for another. He feels this way because of his unique relationship with the Corinthians. He says he “betrothed them to one husband”.

Paul has in mind here the picture of the typical first century wedding. They did not view engagement or betrothment in the same way that we do. For them, an engagement was itself a form of pre-marriage covenant. The deal was as good as done, there was no going back. The engagement period was not to *decide* whether to get married, but rather for the groom to prepare an appropriate place for his new bride, which could take some months. During the engagement period, it was up to the father of the bride to protect his daughter from any other suitors. He wanted to prepare her and keep her pure so that on the wedding day he could be the one to present her to her new husband. This is how Paul feels: he is like the proud father in this image. He came to the Corinthians and preached Christ and his gospel, effectively betrothing them to Christ for the wedding of Jesus and his church that is to come. And now Paul’s job, he feels, is to make sure that the Corinthians remain pure for that day.

Here is a good picture for us of Christian love and duty. If you are a covenant member of Grace Church, the way Paul feels for the Corinthians is the way your pastors feel about you. Buck, Bracken, and I have a strong jealousy, a desire for you to make it to the end pure and undefiled and see Jesus. We want you to remain faithful to him. I can personally attest to the love and care that Bracken and Buck have for you. They have huge hearts of care for our members. And if you are not a covenant member, this is a blessing that you are missing. We want you to commit to our body and to allow us to commit to you. This example here is not just for pastors, either. Although pastors are the ones who must give an account of their faithfulness to the sheep under their care, every church member should feel the weight of responsibility that it is our collective duty, to the best of our ability, to do everything we can to present one another pure before Christ on the last day. I say this often, but this church doesn’t believe membership is simply a check on the box. We have a responsibility to one another, to help one another make it to the end to see Jesus. We must all develop the kind of love that Paul exhibits for the Corinthians. This love is a desire for purity both in life and in doctrine. Paul is jealous for the Corinthians doctrinal purity, for what they are believing, because he knows that it is not disconnected from the purity of their Christian life.

So we come back to Paul’s fear in **verse 3**. Paul alludes to the garden to show our natural tendency is to slip from faith, step by step. The hard reality church, is that while we may aim to be faithful to keep one another, it is likely that there are those in this room, even in our membership, who will no longer be following Jesus five years, ten years, from now. Just like Eve in the garden, we are



susceptible to cunning words of death, lodged inside our sinful hearts by deceivers in disguise. Satan is still just as cunning as he was that day in the garden. The road that leads away from Christ is usually gradual, not dramatic. Very few wake up one day and randomly decide to abandon Christ for some other husband. Our enemy is far too clever to allow that. Many of you are familiar with C.S. Lewis' classic book *The Screwtape Letters*. In it, Lewis imagines the conversations between a young demon and an old, experienced one. Listen to what Screwtape, the experienced temptor, says about "small sins".

You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts...<sup>1</sup>

Lewis hits the nail on the head here. We don't suddenly wake up ready to abandon our devotion to Christ. It comes gradually, as we lose interest, as we stop running to him and to something else or someone else in our need. It comes as we abandon our sincerity and purity. What does it mean to have "sincere" and "pure" devotion to Christ? It means that our devotion to Jesus is not divided. The opposite of sincerity is trickery, hypocrisy, or double mindedness. We are not half-convinced. We are not going through the motions, we are not just using him to get ahead. It means that we long for Christ from a pure heart, ready to trust him. It means that the simple song we sung today after our confession of sin, "Jesus, Strong and Kind", is a song we really believe. I love the chorus:

For the Lord is Good and Faithful,  
He is with us day and night.  
We can always run to Jesus,  
Jesus, Strong and Kind.<sup>2</sup>

What beautiful, simple, childlike faith. But the reality is, I know many days we have trouble singing those words and believing them. Our betrothed husband feels far off, and we are tempted to drift away from sincere and pure devotion and instead just go through the motions. There are so many days where we feel "out of love" with Jesus. So how do we maintain our love and devotion to Jesus, when we are tempted on every side? Let's see two warnings from this text that will help us.

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

<sup>2</sup> CityAlight, "Jesus, Strong and Kind"



## Beware of Longing for Another Jesus (4)

Just recently our ministry residents took part in a survey where they went to different parts of Waco and asked random people some questions about the spiritual climate of our city. The answers were not incredibly surprising. The first questions they asked were about churches in Waco. What are they like, why do people go? They found the people they spoke to generally went to church, or were at least not hostile to the idea of Christianity. Our faith is not typically seen as a blight on the culture of our city, but rather a benefit for those who choose to partake. Many mentioned the idea that different churches are all really the same but just for different types of people depending on preference or personality. The survey got a bit more interesting when the questions started turning to Jesus. Who is he? What do you think about him, or people in Waco think about him? None of the answers seemed overtly bad. No one slammed the idea of Jesus. Again, not surprising in our cultural climate. But what generally lacked in the answers was a lack of *devotion*, a lack of *sincerity*. You might say, it's hard to be sure exactly who Jesus is and exactly what he means.

And I think it begs the question for us this morning: are we really in on this whole Jesus thing? What does our devotion look like to him? Are we easily swayed by interesting ideas and theories about what it means to be truly a follower of Jesus? Even in a church like ours, where we explicitly state that our entire goal is truly know and follow Jesus, we are not immune to the gradual nudge and slide in our hearts and lives, where we begin to ask the question: is the Jesus we claim to know the real one? Have we gotten something wrong?

And here is why that question is so vital to settle: because your heart wants your own little personal Jesus to have and to hold. This was the Corinthians problem too. **Read verse 4.** Paul is going so far as to claim that his opponents, which he calls sarcastically the “super apostles”, are not just getting few things wrong about Jesus, they are proclaiming a totally different Jesus. In proclaiming this different Jesus, they are clinging to some sort of Spirit of the age that is not the Holy Spirit, and they are believing a gospel that is not the true gospel.

We do this too. Unsatisfied with the Christ of scripture, we look elsewhere to define our own personal Jesus. When speaking about a part of the gospel that is hard to understand or believe, you ever heard someone say: “I just don't believe that the Jesus (or God) I know would do \_\_\_\_”? It's the ultimate Trump card, and it's a tragic step on the road to being deceived. When we are able to define the Triune God on our own terms, he becomes whatever we would like him to, and ultimately, he becomes only an idol. What are some Jesus' that we craft for ourselves?

**Prosperity Jesus.** We are tempted to believe that Jesus is all about our monetary or physical blessing, when in reality he became poor so that we could become rich in him, a spiritual and eternal “weight of glory” richness that is way *better* than material wealth.



**Self-help Jesus.** We are tempted to think Jesus came to improve our lives a bit. So some people need him more than others. In reality, he came to give new life and total transformation through total commitment.

**Ghandi Jesus.** We are tempted to believe that Jesus is all about peace and non-violent love. In reality, he brings peace on earth, but he does so through his righteous sword and his saving love. The cross is not primarily an act of non-violence, the cross is a paradoxical and violent defeat of sin and death and satan.

**Universal Jesus.** We are tempted to believe Jesus just wants everyone to be happy, and however you view him is ok. We think there is humility in our inclusivity, but really it is pride. Instead of coming to Jesus on his terms, we hold him to our own and reject him when he doesn't conform to our standards.

**Political Jesus.** We are tempted to believe Jesus' agenda perfectly fits our own personal political agenda, that he came to make the world a better place and following him means voting a particular way. This goes both ways: your own personal false Jesus can be socially minded and left-wing, or he can be the staunch right wing conservative.

I could go on. But the problem with the Jesus that the "super apostles" were preaching, at its core, is that they couldn't see the importance of the physical weakness of Jesus. And really, this is the problem they had with Paul. He was too Christlike in his outward display of weakness. It's also likely that these super apostles were teaching a gospel that had less to do with Jesus being the substitute that brings reconciliation and more to do with following all the rules and laws of Judaism. You see, they had forgot that at the heart of the true gospel is a Jesus who showcases the power of God in his human weakness. The real Jesus is found in the paradox of the cross, where the God of ages bled and died on behalf of sinners and calls all to trust in his work alone. It's offensive, it's radical, it's dirty, it's messy, it's not what we would expect. Jared Wilson says it well:

"My friends, Jesus is not a pop song, snuggly sweater, affectionate boyfriend, a poster on your wall, self-help book, motivational speech, warm cup of coffee, ultimate fighting champion, knight in shining armor, or Robin to your Batman. He is blood. And without blood, you die."<sup>3</sup>

Church, here me very clearly. The road to abandoning Jesus starts with substituting Jesus. It's easy to abandon a Jesus who is your own invention. That Jesus isn't flesh and blood, and therefore he isn't God almighty. And if he isn't God almighty, he can't save you, and he isn't worth your worship. This false Christ might fascinate you, he might receive your devotion for a while, but in the end he can't send his Spirit to seal you and dwell with you, and his gospel is not good news at all. And you'll either drop him once you realize how empty this false Jesus is, or you'll spend your whole life as a fool who chases after the wind. The stakes are high. I'm not trying to scare you into submission or

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<sup>3</sup> Jared Wilson, *Your Jesus Is Too Safe*, 243



something, I'm just trying to wake you up to the reality of life here. When it comes to protecting our doctrine and life, ignorance is not bliss. As Paul said in chapter 2, "for we are not ignorant of [Satan's] designs."

When your heart, or the heart of those you love and area called to help protect, starts to long after another Jesus than the suffering servant show in Scripture, beware. Speak up, do something, say something. Do it gently, but firmly if needed. Do it in love, but don't just sit back as false suitors come in and try to snatch away the bride of Christ.

## **Beware of Longing for Another Ministry (5-12)**

The reason that the Corinthians were in danger of running away from sincere and pure devotion to Christ and into the arms of another Jesus and a different gospel is not primarily because they did their homework and studied all the factors and theological ins and outs of the gospel Paul preached. No, what was drawing them away from the false Jesus was not just disillusionment from the person of Christ, but the *ministry* of Christ. In other words, you can have what seems to be a sincere and pure devotion to Jesus, and you understand what he says and hear it well, but when it comes to actually *following* him, the cost is too high. Many are drawn away from following Jesus not because they have come to despise him, but they have come to despise following him. The question is not just "Is Jesus enough for you" but also "is the way of Jesus enough for you?".

This was the problem of the Corinthians. Let's keep reading and see how they not only heard a false Jesus preached, but a false way of following Jesus shown. **Read 5-6.** Here Paul makes a concession for the Corinthians: he is not as skilled in traditional oratory as these "super apostles". This doesn't mean he was a poor communicator, but rather just that he don't communicate in the same way as them. His speaking was "unskilled" in the sense that it wasn't showy and flashy and braggadocious. He didn't command a crowd due to the spectacle of his teaching. But this does not mean he is inferior, quite the opposite. What is important for Christian preaching and Christian ministry, says Paul, is not show but substance. He is not interested in displaying a false pretense to the Corinthians. He wants them to really *know* Christ, to have a *knowledge* of him.

Many people desire to follow Jesus because of the show. It's just something to do, they get swept up in the emotion. They are promised spiritual power, or healing, or financial prosperity. But they are deceived. Following Jesus is not about constantly riding a wave of positive emotions, it's actually very hard. And the super apostles were not up front with the Corinthians. They were outwardly impressive, but they had no true power. In the same way, we can be deceived to turn from Christ if we are tempted to believe that following him is more about displays of emotion and power and less about *knowing* him by faith.

In his sermon on the mount in Matthew 7, Jesus makes this exact point. He is warning his hearers of false teachers, who are really just wolves in sheep's clothing. And they come to the end, face to



face with Jesus the great judge of the world, and they plead to be accepted based on their outward acts of power.

On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

What does Jesus say to those who lay claim to their show as their righteousness? Depart from me, I never *knew* you. Devotion to Christ is not about outward displays of emotionalism and power, it's about intimacy. We must *know* and be known by Christ through our humble and simple faith to make it to the wedding day.

We see in **verses 7-11** Paul continues to separate himself from the super apostles. You see, all of these speakers accepted money for their efforts. The more they charged, the more in demand they were, the more valuable they seemed to be. They were like entertainers, preaching their version of the gospel to line their own pockets. And so this was their slander against Paul: he preaches free of charge! How could his words be worth anything? Does he not value you? Remember the Corinthians are a wealthy, self-made culture. They are similar to us: we often have trouble accepting gifts. It hurts our pride. And so even the Corinthians themselves began to believe that by not asking them for money for his work, Paul was sinning against them. But it's not as if Paul did not desire to support himself. The reason he did not accept or ask for money from the Corinthians is because of his love for them. He knew that no matter what it took, he needed to separate himself from the super apostles. If he accepted money from the Corinthians, it would only be a burden to them as he would be teaching them that he was just like their professional orators and entertainers. Instead, he received support from the Macedonians. Unlike the Corinthians, the Macedonians were not wealthy, and their giving would not be a burden but a blessing to them.

And here is why this is important. The Corinthians were thrown off track by this. They can't believe that Paul would be so *different* from what they expected. He won't even take our money! When it comes to following Jesus, we do the same. We get in our head exactly what it will mean to follow him, and when our expectations are overturned, we become dismayed! We burden ourselves with expectations of our Christian life in the same way the Corinthians burdened themselves. We assume that following Jesus means a life free of suffering, as so we are tempted to abandon him when we find that isn't the case. We assume following Jesus means we will find and marry the perfect Godly spouse, and when the months and years pass in singleness, we are tempted to abandon our sincere and pure devotion for him. We are expecting a ministry of our own making, instead of following Jesus by faith into the New Covenant ministry of weakness.

Or, when we experience some opposition, we long for a change. We change churches, change groups, change jobs. We see the grass as greener on the other side. We compare ourselves to other Christians, and we think following Jesus would be better if we had their life. I admit to this, church. So often I fight the temptation to look at other churches in our city, big and growing





churches, and imagine what ministry would be like there. And all it does is lead me away from sincerity and purity of devotion.

Paul will have none of this, and he provides for us a godly example to follow. Instead of wishing the Corinthians would pay him as they paid these “super apostles”, instead of longing for a different ministry, he knows the that way to life is narrow. Look what he says in **verses 12-15**. Paul is not convinced by these super apostles, he sees right through them. He calls them false apostles, with masks on to make them appear real, comparing them to Satan himself! He is not tempted by their ministry, it is not superior. Next week we will see how he *boasts* of the hardship of his ministry, not to show how he is superior, but to show that although the way of Christ is the way of the cross, it is the way of life.

So this morning, ask this question: **what is leading me away from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ?** We have two ways before us. I cannot stand up here and pretend like following Jesus is easy. Devotion to him is costly. You will have hardship, you will suffer as he suffered. You won't be headed for fame or fortune. It won't be flashy or sexy. Pure hearted devotion to Jesus won't make you popular. Your ministry won't be the one that the world longs for. No one will wish to be you.

But the ministry of the new covenant, the ministry of the paradox of weakness, is worth it. Why? Because it's the ministry of truth. It's the path that leads you away from the deception of Satan and into the arms of Christ your beloved. Satan masquerades as an angel of light, Jesus is the very light of the New Heavens and New Earth. There is no comparison here.

And Church, you will have friends who abandon their faith. You will be tempted to envy them and their life at times. But don't be deceived. Don't fall into the trap of longing for another Jesus: the one we preach to you is enough. He is strong and kind, he is perfect and true, you can always trust and believe him. He comes preaching repentance and new life, if you would only turn from sin and trust in him. He has not come to condemn or to make your life heart, he has come to give you joy everlasting. Don't be deceived: the Christ you were betrothed to is coming back for you. Don't give in when the way is hard. The hard way is his way, and he will sustain you.

And one more thing. As you fight deception and fight for pure and sincere devotion to Christ, fight for your brothers and sisters too. Fight for the weak in faith. Let's do this together.

