

THE SEDUCTION OF DECEPTION – Part 1 (Rev. 13:11-12 March 23, 2003)

If I were Satan, how would I set out to destroy *Grace Bible Church*?

I would destroy this church not with the first beast of Revelation 13 – I would unleash the second beast – the false prophet – the deceiver.

I would not have him begin with an attack on the truthfulness of Scripture or the deity of Christ or the atonement. This church would smell that rat coming a mile away.

If I were Satan, I would introduce a few seductive diversions.

I would talk much about truth and doctrine and standing for right and little about love and understanding.

I would find those zealous for every truth and find their hot buttons. Whisper that there is a form of music that is more biblical or a way to raise children that is more God-honouring or that the evangelisers are more biblical than the givers.

And I would tell them that these are truths worth fighting for – and then without love to cushion the blow – I would watch the factions form.

I would murmur that to be relevant we need to know how the world thinks – Oprah, Survivor, Broncos. And once they are listening – I would tell them how satisfying sex and money and power can be. I would unleash brute materialism at its seductive best.

I would talk much about satisfaction and little about self-denial.

I would tell the men to work harder – but suggest that it is so they can give more and support more missionaries – knowing full well it will go instead to homes and cars and things that wean them from the power of the cross.

I would talk about spiritual blessings but make sure I never link them to the true ground of such blessings – prayer, the Word, fellowship, giving, self-sacrifice, obedience.

Sow a few seeds. Some will bite at every distraction. Some will bite at only one. But that is enough. Once I cut their spiritual life from its real power – it is then that the introduction of a seductive heresy is easy. This pattern has been repeated again and again and again.

Brothers and sisters – the sermons on the second beast are some of the most important sermons I have preached. This passage outlines how Satan will try and take down this church. He will unleash the second beast – the false prophet – the most dangerous foe we face.

The false prophet is the second beast of Revelation 13. And he is found in verses 11 through 18.

I venture to say that throughout history many more men and women have been diverted from the truth by the second beast than the first.

There are five realities about these false prophets revealed in these verses. We will look at the first two this week.

The *first* reality concerning the false prophet is:

1. False prophets look like lambs and speak like dragons. v. 11.

Verse 11:

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth.

Satan calls this beast forth from out of the earth. This is a contrast to the first beast who comes out of the sea.

What is the significance of this beast coming out of the earth?

- a. First, this beast is linked with the beasts of Daniel. In Daniel 7:17 – the beasts come out of the earth.
- b. Second, the sea and the earth were places where evil powers came from. In Jewish apocalyptic the sea and the earth are the homes of two primeval monsters.

Leviathan a female monster who lives in the depths of the sea and Behemoth a male monster who lives in the waste places of the earth.

The abodes of these primeval monsters became symbols of where all that is evil and chaotic and malicious arises.

- c. Third, remember that in chapter 12 – Satan was cast down to the earth.

Revelation 12:12:

For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the **earth** and the **sea**, because the devil has come down to you.

The earth and the sea throughout this book represent all of the human domain. The whole sphere in which Satan works his wrath.

- d. But, fourthly, and perhaps most importantly is the difference between the land and the sea.

The sea constantly changes. It churns and moves. It is a dangerous place.

But land is stability. When you got off a boat you were glad to be on dry land. Land did not shift and change. You can trust the land.

The point is that you expect danger from the sea. You don't expect danger from the land.

The beast from the sea – you expect opposition from him. The beast from the land – his danger takes you unexpectedly.

The first beast comes in outright opposition. The second beast comes in deception. And this makes him incredibly dangerous.

Look at the end of verse 11:

And he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon.

The first beast is horrid. Gruesome and grotesque horns. Blasphemous names.

But this is just a little lamb with two little horns. Cute rather than dangerous.

He looks like a lamb. He has a veneer of being associated with **the** Lamb. He wants you to think that his words are the words of **the** Lamb – Jesus Christ.

But what he actually says is of the devil. He spoke as a dragon.

Three times in the book – this beast is called – the false prophet. Revelation 16:13; 19:20 and 20:10. This is what this beast does – he deceives you to think he speaks on behalf of the Lamb when in fact he speaks the words of the dragon.

Just as the first beast was kingdoms and government authorities in every age that opposed Christ and His people, so this beast recurs throughout history taking different forms in every age.

This second beast is every false propaganda, philosophy and religion that draws men away from the one true God – the New Age movement, idolatry, emperor worship, Roman Catholicism, Buddhism, Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Faith churches, materialism, truth without love. And it culminates in a final great false prophet who will deceive the hearts of many.

Here is the key to this section. He does **not** come looking like a dragon. He comes in seduction – looking like a lamb and as verse 14 says – he deceives.

You think you are worshipping Christ and serving Christ when in fact you are worshipping and serving antichrist.

He looks harmless. He seems to be with the Lamb. But at heart he is all dragon. He will deceive even the elect if possible.

Jesus spoke of this. Matthew 7:15:

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

This beast is the dragon's mouthpiece. But he wants you to think that he is speaking for Christ.

Satan appears as an angel of light not with horns and a pitchfork. Satan is not so foolish as to present a pack of obvious heresies and expect us to swallow them.

He is far more dangerous. He dresses heresy up as truth. They contain enough truth. They say enough of the right things to deceive.

They seem like the Lamb. But their core is pure Satan.

Let me state very clearly just where the false prophet's playground lies – where he works his mischief.

At one end – there are truths that are crucial to the faith – and must **never** be altered in any way – the deity of Christ – substitutionary atonement – salvation by faith.

In the middle are truths that are important – but are **not** the basis of our union with Christ. I refer to such truths as hell, creation, inerrancy.

Then at the other end are truths that while not unimportant are areas of liberty as to what you chose to do. How you educate children. What music to sing. Whether alcohol can be consumed.

And in each area – the false prophet is right at home.

Let me start with the crucial end. Here, the false prophet skews a crucial truth ever so subtly. It looks biblical, it is all dragon.

As a very young Christian – I opened my door to find two men carrying Bibles. I soon found out they were Jehovah's Witnesses – and in my youthful zeal I said come in – because I had planned to lead them to the truth.

We met for many weeks. We looked at the Bible and Christ. So much of what they said sounded just like what I had been taught.

Even what they said about Christ sounded plausible. Jesus was born of Mary in Bethlehem. God was His father.

Well yes – some do say Jesus is God – but that makes no sense does it? How can He be God and the Holy Spirit be God and God be God – yet there is only one God?

What the Bible actually says is that Jesus is created. Jesus was simply the form the archangel Michael took on earth.

And they had Bible verses that seemed to back them up.

So close. And they are so nice.

But finally, the Spirit of God would not let me fall into that deception – but I have to admit, I went close. It sounded so biblical, so plausible and they were such dedicated young men.

Looked like a lamb – spoke like a dragon.

Satan is not stupid. He knows how to deceive. He is the father of lies and has been from the beginning. He deceived Eve. He is the source of all deceptions since then.

He is a master at shifting truth fractionally knowing it is the slippery slope to disaster.

He knows just the right strings to pull.

How does he work havoc in that middle group – the important but not decisive for salvation?

He introduces doubt.

Well yes – that is one way to view things – but others – fine men indeed – have disagreed and they can help you a great deal.

Yes, many do say there is a hell. But, you know your Bible, does hell really mesh with a God who loves the world? Satan might punish forever – but not our loving Father.

And hell is such a stumbling block to outreach.

Then once you take out hell, it is only a small step to universalism and from there you can deny the necessity of salvation.

What does he do in the third area – the areas of liberty?

The whisper comes. Boy, those homeschoolers are so proud. They think they are doing what is best – but it's pretty obvious that they isolate their children from the world and fail to equip them to reach out in this world.

Man, those non-homeschoolers are so liberal. Letting their kids associate with the world. Exposing them to the filth and perversions of a secular institution.

And to both groups comes this whisper – this is a truth worth fighting for. God is honoured if you stick to your guns.

Whereas I put it to you – that this is the whisper of the false prophet. It looks like the lamb – in fact it is the dragon.

And the fault-lines for division are in place.

And once there is division – the focus of the church is undermined, the power of the church is undermined – time and effort are spent in areas that are not central to the kingdom – and then when we are weak, the false prophet will introduce a heresy that really matters and it will blindsides us.

Brethren, understand the progress of heresy. Understand how Satan will attack this church.

His false prophet won't attack this church on the essential doctrinal issues yet. He will stir the pot a bit in the important but not essential areas. And his main attack will be in the areas of liberty. Consume us there and then when we are weak – then introduce the real heresy.

This pattern has served him well for centuries.

At no time in the history of the church has the church moved from error to heresy in one fell swoop. It is small seemingly innocuous steps that lead the saints astray.

And he has this on his side. Brothers and sisters – our hearts are deceitful and proud – they want to believe heresy – they want to think they are right – and they want to move toward error.

Brothers and sisters, it is so much easier to see a real heresy when it has developed. But then when it has crept in and developed power, then we spend our time fighting it after it is entrenched – when it is almost too late to undo.

The only way to stop this is through the prayerful, humble reading, re-reading and meditating on the Scriptures. We must fill ourselves with the mind of Christ. We must know what is crucial and what is peripheral. We must let love cover a multitude of sins. And we must apply the truth of Christ to our lives.

Brethren, if we are vulnerable at this time – it is in the area of liberties – grey areas – personal preferences – areas that can consume us, divide us and ultimately destroy us.

If you think that areas like music or raising children or alcohol – or any peripheral area is important enough to divide over – then you have listened to the whisper of the false prophet.

You are not serving Christ – you are serving antichrist.

It could happen here. We become known for what we oppose – rather than being known for promoting Christ. And the seeds of destruction are in place.

There is a *second* reality about these false prophets.

2. False prophets seek to seduce the worship of men from Christ to antichrists. v. 12

Verse 12:

He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

The Bible would tell us that:

- ❖ The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Satan's main task in life is to pervert this. How he would like us to think can be summed up like this:

- ❖ The chief end of man should be to glorify Satan and suffer with him forever – while thinking he is glorifying God and is going to enjoy Him forever.

Satan wants us to think we are worshipping the Lord – when in fact we are worshipping him.

Satan and the two beasts ape the trinity. They seek to usurp the worship of the triune God. They mimic God and want us to believe that we are worshipping God.

Look at how they ape the trinity.

In Genesis 1 – God the Father speaks and calls forth the creation.

Here, the dragon speaks and call forth his agents that seek to destroy the creation.

Now notice all of the parallels between Christ and antichrist.

Jesus is the image of God. Notice that in chapter 12 verse 3 – the dragon has seven heads and ten horns. And the first beast in chapter 13 verse 1 has seven heads and ten horns. Antichrist is the image of the dragon.

Think of these two statements of Jesus. Matthew 11:27:

All things have been handed over to Me by My Father.

Matthew 28:18:

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

But here, look at chapter 13 verse 2:

And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

Just as God the Father gave Christ all authority – so the dragon gives the first beast power and authority.

Think about this. In His High Priestly prayer in John 17:1 – Jesus said this:

Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You.

Christ gives the glory to God the Father.

Revelation 13:4 – the beast gives the glory to the dragon.

In Exodus 15:11 Moses said about the Lord's victory over pharaoh:

Who is like You among the gods, O Lord?
Who is like You, majestic in holiness,

Now in Revelation 13:4 the cry is – Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?

Antichrists mimic Christ. In chapter 1 – both God the Father and Christ are introduced as Him who is and who was and who is to come.

But the beast doesn't quite measure up – he was, now is not and is about to come.

Christ received a fatal wound and His fatal wound was healed – He rose from the dead. Antichrist mimics this.

Also the seven heads and ten horns with ten crowns. Seven and ten are numbers associated with Christ. Crowns are associated with Christ.

In verse 7 – antichrist has authority over every tribe and tongue and nation. But, Christ is the One who has the worship of every tribe and tongue and nation.

Every facet of antichrist is designed to ape Christ. The very word – antichrist – anti – can mean opposed to – **or** in the place of.

At times antichrists oppose Christ. At other times they seek to seduce and deceive and draw away the worship of men. And in this they are aided by false prophets.

But, here is the point. Who would worship a beast? Who willingly worships Satan? Only those who are deceived.

Either they think he is the true God – **or** they think they are worshipping the true God.

And the power of this deception is given to the false prophet – his seduction, his lies, his propaganda. He leads the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

Let me say this again. The reason John presents so many parallels between antichrist and Christ – is that men keep thinking they are serving Christ when in fact they serve antichrist.

Note also that the false prophet apes the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and by the Son and His task is to glorify Christ.

John 16:14:

He [The Holy Spirit] will glorify Me [Christ].

But here, the task of the false prophet is to glorify the first beast – to lead the world into the worship of the first beast.

But who would readily worship Satan? Who would be confused as to whether they are bowing the knee to Satan or Christ?

The false prophet has great powers to deceive.

The Holy Spirit worked miracles to affirm the truth of the words of prophets. In the Old Testament – the prophets were filled with the Spirit – and enabled to work mighty miracles – that the people would know they were of God. In the New Testament – there were gifts of miracles to affirm the gospel.

Here in verse 13, the false prophet performs great signs to cause men to worship the first beast.

The Holy Spirit seals us – Ephesians 1:13-14. Here, in verse 16, the false prophet gives those who dwell on the earth a seal – a mark.

Satan is not original. Only the Lord is creative and original. Satan can only mimic and counterfeit. But his real genius is that his counterfeits look so good, so godly, but at their core are so evil.

I have laboured this for one reason. The work of the false prophet is to make the beast look like Christ. To deceive even the elect if it were possible. To deceive you brethren.

Next week I will talk more about the areas of deception this church is vulnerable to.

But for now, know that this is what he exists for. He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence – or better – on his behalf.

All the power of the kingdoms and governments are at the disposal of the false prophet to work his deception.

Satan uses these two different forms of evil to reinforce each other in the pursuit of his main aim.

The two beasts work together.

At times the beast and the false prophet are a sort of Satanic good cop, bad cop routine. The church is softened up by the brutality of antichrist – overt persecution. And then comes the sweet voice of reason – hey just back off a bit. Why don't you just bow down to Caesar but in your heart refuse to worship him. Give a bit – God will understand – and the persecution will slacken off.

But more often the first beast – the governmental power – provides the resources, the propaganda vehicle, the judicial muscle to back up the lies of the false prophet.

The power of Rome backed the imperial cult.

The power of the Holy Roman Empire backed the Roman Church.

The power of Hitler backed Goebbels.

The power of Middle-East governments backs Islam.

The power of Salt Lake City backs Mormonism.

Do not be deceived, the power of our government backs our false prophets.

The false prophet does not just work in totalitarian regimes. He works quite well here in Australia.

Using the power of the Australian government – Christ has been removed from schools. Evolution is taught and the Creator ignored. Tolerance is taught and truth is ignored. Sexual liberty is taught and fidelity disdained. Discipline is frowned upon and freedom is espoused.

And the great vehicle through which the false prophet works in this society is the media.

TV, radio, print. They vigorously promote materialism and pleasure and sexual freedom and tolerance.

Let me give you one recent example of how the false prophet has been at work in our nation.

Once if a minister declared – Jesus is the *only* way to heaven – you would get an argument. A debate about what was truth.

Today what you get is this – but that is an attack on the Hindus. You are intolerant.

The only statement that is not tolerated is the statement that there is absolute truth.

If you want to see intolerance – stand up and say – Jesus is the *only* way to heaven.

Phillip Jensen did just that. And he found out what happens when you do that.

Phillip Jensen preached a sermon at his Commencement Service as the new Anglican Dean of Sydney, on March 7 this year. Just three weeks ago. In that sermon he said these things:

If I were to say Jesus died and rose again, people in our tolerant and carefree city would say ‘well, we’re glad you think so and happy that you feel free to say it.’

But when I say Jesus died and rose again as the one and only unique sacrifice for sins and the judge and ruler of all mankind, irrespective of race religion or creed, then the opposition starts. ...

Christ is either right or wrong. He cannot be relativised as right for some people but wrong for others. The Qur'an denies that Jesus died. The Bible declares he died and his death is central to his whole life and message. The Jews agree that Jesus died but deny that he rose again. All these views cannot be right. They could all be wrong – Jesus may never have lived. But if he did live then either he died or he did not die. And if he died he either is still dead or he rose from the grave. If one view is right, the others must be wrong. We must stop the stupidity of stretching social tolerance into religious or philosophical relativism.

But here is the problem for the preacher: people do not want me to say anything or anybody is wrong. I am supposed to speak the truth without denying the error. But, friends, that is an erroneous view – the erroneous view of liberalism and relativism.

Let me illustrate by an incident that happened last year. I spoke to a Hindu student who loved my teaching from John's Gospel about Jesus. He believed in Jesus. Jesus was, for him, one of the great spiritual leaders. But like all good Hindus, that did not mean that he should depart from his Hindu gods, but rather just add Jesus to the list. Therefore he did not like the exclusiveness of Jesus. In fact he tried to argue that all religions were right.

I offered to show him that Hinduism is wrong without attacking Hinduism. I asked the question, 'did Jesus die?' If he did then the Qur'an, the most sacred and authoritative book of Islam – the supposed perfect revelation of Allah – was wrong. If on the other hand he did not die, then the Bible was wrong, not just about some unimportant peripheral detail but about the very central claim of Christianity. They both cannot be right – both are possibly wrong, either are possibly right – but it is impossible for both to be right. And if they both cannot be right then his Hinduism, which taught him that all religions are right, cannot be right either.

He left me very disturbed by our conversation. But so far has continued in his Hindu religion, not because of what is true or right but because of tribal family pressure. We must not be Christians because of tribal family pressure, but because it is true.

There are many lovely, wonderful Hindus, Muslims, Jews and atheists in our city.

This sermon caused a firestorm. Several articles in national newspapers. Editorials in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian*.

I have just read to you the exact words of Phillip Jensen. Now listen to the media spin.

An article entitled *No sacred cows in dean's tirade* by Kelly Burke in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on March 10 said this:

Jensen ... delivered a broadside attack on secularism, religious tolerance, political correctness and the media. ...

Mr Jensen spoke of his anger at a Hindu student who had talked of Jesus as one of history's great spiritual leaders.

Hear that?

A defence of Christianity and a statement that there is truth becomes **a broadside attack on religious tolerance and political correctness.**

A discussion of religious inconsistencies with a Hindu student becomes **anger at a Hindu student.**

You read that article and you feel that Jensen seethes with hatred and bigotry – when he is merely sharing the truth.

Or this. In an *Editorial* in the March 18 edition of *The Australian* entitled – *How the dean raised the devil* – the editor ended his article with these words.

Of course, the Dean recognises the rights of other Australian citizens to have different faiths, but judges that they “cannot all be right. Some, or all of them, are wrong. And if wrong, (they) are the monstrous lies and deceits of Satan – devised to destroy the life of the believers”. This presupposes that there is only one way to God. Yet Christ says of himself, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.” Granted, the revelation of God as “Father” is uniquely Biblical but does it, perhaps, allow that there are various ways to God. After all, sometimes such faith is entirely fortuitous, depending on where you were born or brought up. Or your belief or unbelief may be as entirely experiential, defining your philosophical or religious attitudes for the rest of your life.

Hear that? He even quotes Christ – “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.” But then manages to say that this may well mean that there are various ways to God and these depend on such factors as where you were born, how you were brought up and what life experiences you have had.

So how intolerant, bigoted and dangerous of Phillip Jensen to say that not every religion can be correct.

The false prophet at work.

An editor of a national newspaper quotes Christ saying there is only one way and manages to turn it into support for universalism. The media is a powerful – perhaps the most powerful arm of the false prophet in this country.

I am reminded of a quote by C.S. Lewis:

To accuse a journalist of lying is akin to accusing your dog of being poor at arithmetic.

Tolerance and free speech is one vehicle to get lies and pornography and deceit into the public consciousness.

This week, I received a call from a member of this church. A public library put paintings of full-frontal nudity in its windows and he complained. And the response – we can't censure freedom of expression.

You want us to be dictators and suppress art?

I guarantee that if I asked to put a visual presentation of the gospel in the window and entitled it – *Jesus is the **only** way* – then it would be censored.

A little public nudity. Good stuff. Satan loves the inflaming of passions.

At this point, some of you might be sitting there saying – I know universalism is wrong, I know nudity is wrong, I know the Jehovah's Witnesses are wrong.

This message hasn't got much for me. The false prophet won't catch me out there.

Let me say this. Next week – I am going to get very specific in mentioning the areas I believe we are vulnerable to deception in.

But, let me give you a small taste by ending with a discussion about what it means to worship the beast.

Yes, this can be overt – bowing the knee to an idol. But, brothers and sisters – there are many ways to succumb to the false prophet and worship Satan.

The worship of Satan is usually encouraged surreptitiously by replacing the primacy of God with something else.

Colossians 3:5 describes greed as idolatry. Hear that, greed is the worship of Satan.

Greed or covetousness – is seeking fulfilment in things. Replacing satisfaction in God with satisfaction in anything else.

This is the great tool of the false prophet.

He knows that we have longings and desires. He knows we yearn for satisfaction.

So he merely seduces us by seeking to fulfil those longings apart from Christ.

Brethren, whatever dominates your thoughts, your longings, your ambitions is covetousness. It can be money or lust or revenge or ambition or acclaim.

It can be family or career or learning.

What New Testament book speaks more about idolatry than any other? I put it to you that it is another Johannine book – the book of 1 John.

John ends this epistle – in chapter 5 verse 21 with these words:

Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

But many are stunned by this because they point out that John has never mentioned idols or idolatry in the whole epistle.

The fact is that the whole epistle is about idolatry.

If you do not have faith that Jesus came in the flesh – it is idolatry.

If you love the world, the flesh or the devil – it is idolatry.

If you love the world or the things in the world – it is idolatry.

If you love yourself but do not love your brothers – it is idolatry.

All these things seek to wean our hearts from the sufficiency of Christ.

Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

Brethren, I don't know what weans your heart from the sufficiency and power of Christ. I know what weakens me. I know where I seek satisfaction apart from Christ. But I don't know where it is for you.

It might be TV, it might be career, it might be brute materialism, it might be pornography, it might be sports.

Anything that puts the focus on you – your needs, your longings, your desires – starts making you look to satisfy those needs, longings and desires.

And there is only one place they can be satisfied. Christ is the living water, the bread out of heaven, the One who gives abundant life, the One who provides true peace and joy.

Anything else is like drinking from a dry cistern. And it is the worship of Satan.

The false prophet knows how to inflame your thirst and present a mirage – things, ambition, women, pleasure – things that give might seem to be the solution – but can never satisfy. Things that are idolatry. The pursuit of such things is the worship of antichrist.

Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

Meditate on His word day and night. Apply His word daily. Find satisfaction in Christ. And in this you will guard yourself from idols.

- v. 11 False prophets look like lambs and speak like dragons.
- v. 12 False prophets seek to seduce the worship of men from Christ to antichrists.
- vv. 13-15 False prophets manifest their seduction through deceptions of great power and persecution.
- vv. 16-17 False prophets know who they have deceived.
- v. 18 False prophets look like the Lamb but are dragons.