



WHY THE WORLD REJECTS GOD'S WORD

“18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. 22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: 23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence. 30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: 31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

- 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

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We are here, or should be here, in obedience to our Lord. We are here because He has given us commands, not in some personal esoteric way, not through some vision or dream, not because I hear voices from heaven – I don't – but because I have a Bible, and the Word of God is that very Word of God.

This body of people are defined by its commitment to Holy Scripture. For true Christians the Bible is our greatest treasure. It is more precious to us than gold, than much fine gold. It is sweeter to us than honey from the honeycomb. We can say with the psalmist in Psalm 119, at least a half a dozen times, "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. I love Your commands." The apostle Paul said that those who belong to God possess the love of the truth. John records that those who love the Lord keep His commandments. And the psalmist said in Psalm 40 and verse 8, "I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart."

We desire the word like a babe desires milk – to borrow Peter's words. In John 6, many of the followers of Jesus – superficial followers – had abandoned Him. And He said to the remaining disciples, "Will you also go away?" to which their spokesman Peter said, "To whom shall we go? You and You alone have the words of eternal life."

The mark of a true Christian is love for Scripture, love for Scripture whether it's promises or commands. God's true church has always been a place where people hunger for the truth from the Bible. It's why we're here. It's why we're here every time we're here.

Paul, writing in 1 Thessalonians, commended that church in chapter 1, verse 4, "knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you." And then he goes on to say, "Here's the evidence that God truly chose you and redeemed you. For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." You can always tell who the true believers are; they are moved more by the Word of God than anything else. They are moved to loving, joyful obedience and worship. In chapter 2 and verse 13, Paul says to this same congregation, "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men,

but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.” That’s how true Christians approach the Word of God.

If this teaching platform was not the place for the proclamation of the Word of God, there would no people - empty. That’s why you’re here. “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” That is the greatest commendation that can be given by the Lord to a church through the apostle Paul. And as your pastor these many, many years, it is my greatest commendation to you. It’s clear to me that you love the Word of God. That’s why you’re here. And you love the God of the Word as well. Sadly, serious, careful, thoughtful, diligent labor in the Scripture to bring up its rich treasures is not popular these days even in churches.

Jim Packer died at the age of 93. Jim Packer understood what was going on in the church, even at his age. Listen to what he wrote in a preface to *A Christian Directory*. *A Christian Directory* was written by Richard Baxter back in the 1600s, a Puritan. In his introduction Packer characterized evangelicalism this way: “Ego-centric, zany, simplistic, degenerate, half magic spell nonsense, which is all the world sees when it watches religious TV or looks directly at the professed evangelical community.” Packer went on to say, “Our how-to’s – how to have a wonderful family, better sex, financial success in a Christian way, how to cope with grief, life passages, crises, fears, frustrating relationships, and what not else – gives us formula to be followed a series of supposedly simple actions on our part in the manner of” – and I love this – “painting by numbers.” He compared that to the great work of Richard Baxter, and he had written his Ph.D. dissertation at Oxford on Baxter. And Baxter was the one who said, “I preach as a dying man to dying men.”

J. I. Packer compared contemporary evangelicalism with Richard Baxter, who in the *Christian Directory* alone, one book, wrote more than a million words on the interpretation and application of the Word of God. Packer said, “That book is a high level of intelligent Bible-based, theologically integrated wisdom with unfailing, unimpaired clarity that is dazzling to the mind.” Where do people go for dazzling interpretations of Scripture? Where do they go for Bible teaching that is highly accurate, intelligent, theologically rich, sound, integrated, clear, and dazzling in its truthfulness?

R. C. Sproul died in December of 2017, and he said, “Our culture is embedded in proud mediocrity. That should be obvious to everyone.” He said, “While there are still hard-working scholastic minds in science and technology and researchers doing hard and tedious labor in the fields, the culture has in general settled for what is quick and cheap: junk music, junk art, and junk thinking. Our culture is far too easily satisfied and entertained. Excellence, truth, and real beauty are the great triad of virtues that are now replaced by funny, cool, and cute.” R. C. said, “We get mediocrity because we want it. We actually crave it.”

Paul predicted this would happen, that there would be a time when men would want to have their ears tickled. There’s a lot of that now. There is clearly a trend to eliminate the transcendent, to eliminate the biblical, to eliminate the theological, the profound the demanding truth of Scripture, and feed the mediocrity-hungry crowds with a mediocre message and mediocre preaching, so that the church accepts and legitimizes the superficiality that people want.

Pop culture Christianity serves nonbelievers just fine. People don’t want to take the Bible seriously, so why should the church take it seriously? Pastors seek cleverness, creativity style rather than demanding and rigorous study of Scripture. How far we have fallen.

I like to go back to the Puritans, sixteenth and seventeenth century powerful preachers called Puritans because their goal was to purify the church in England. They were so faithful that in 1662 all of them were ejected from their churches in what is called the Great Ejection. There are all kinds of stories of how they were executed for their faithfulness to the Word of God being proclaimed to a religious environment that had no interest in it.

Jim Parker wrote “It does not seem possible to deny that the Puritans were strongest just where evangelical Christians today are weakest. Here were men of outstanding intellectual power in whom the mental habits fostered by sober scholarship were linked with a flaming zeal for God and a minute acquaintance with the human heart. All their work reveals this unique fusion of gifts and graces. Where the Puritans called for order, discipline, depth, and thoroughness, our temper is one of casual haphazardness and restless impatience. We crave for stunts, novelties, and entertainments. We have lost our taste for solid study, humble self-examination, disciplined meditation, and unspectacular hard work in our callings and in our

prayers. Again, where Puritanism had God and His glory as its unifying center, our thinking revolves around ourselves, as if we were the hub of the universe.”

That’s the popular kind of teaching today. “No wonder” – he says – “so many professed conversions fall away. And then in teaching on the Christian life, our habit is to depict it as a path of thrilling feelings rather than working faith, and of supernatural interruptions rather than of rational righteousness. And in dealing with the Christian experience we dwell constantly on joy, peace, happiness, satisfaction, with no balance to the divine discontent of Romans 7.” This generation is desperate for the Word of God, but it doesn’t want the Word of God. And the church continually gives the world what it wants, and so it becomes superficial.

There’s a prophet in the Old Testament by the name of Amos. Eight centuries before Christ, the northern kingdom of Israel was confident. Morals had crashed. Honesty was gone. Abuse of the poor was very common. Upper-class people were indulgent and vile. But money was plenty, prosperity was widespread, and false worship was popular. The northern kingdom thought they had God on their side, until God dropped a bomb on the northern kingdom. That bomb was Amos.

He stormed into Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, as a prophet of doom, repeatedly saying all through his prophecy that God is about to judge. The whole book is a pronouncement of divine judgment, fulfilled in the Assyrian conquest. “The whole nation will be” – he said – “conquered, deported, and enslaved.” And when they were enslaved, here would be the worse of it, chapter 8, verse 11: “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord. People will stagger from sea to sea and from the north even to the east; they will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.”

That is the most horrifying curse of all curses – a famine of the Word of God. The streams of divine revelation dry up. Those who would not listen to the prophets when they spoke the Word of God would go into captivity, scattered all over the Pagan world, and they would never find a prophet to speak the Word of God. Amos pictures a scene of spiritual destitution

that is the most horrible of all possible settings: hoping to hear a word from God and never being able to hear it.

For us, it seems the Word of God is becoming more scarce. The world of unbelievers doesn't want to hear the Word of God. False Christians don't really want to hear the Word of God, they want everything but the Scripture; and in many cases, they're getting it even from so-called churches.

Those who hold to the fact that the Bible is the divine revelation from God, those who are sober and serious and diligent students and teachers of Holy Scripture, those who are being faithful are not honored so much as they are ridiculed. Why have we held on? Why are we still here going through the Bible verse by verse by verse by verse when it's not popular in the world or even in the church? The answer to that question is found in the text I read earlier. If you'll open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 1.

Nowhere is the issue of the work of God in the Scripture more richly presented than this. Those of you who know me know that I don't normally cover two chapters in one sermon. Two words maybe. But the text that I read you from chapter 1, verse 18 to 2 verse 16 is about divine wisdom. The word "wise" or "wisdom" is used twenty times, and it's contrasted with foolishness which is used six times. The whole section explains why Grace Church is here and why we accept the wisdom of God revealed in Scripture, the gospel, the good news of the cross. And by the way, in this text you see the phrase "the word of the cross," then you see the phrase "the wisdom of God," and then you see the phrase "the testimony of God." The word of the cross, the wisdom of God, and the testimony of God are all the same. This is the gospel revealed through Scripture. Now there's a simple way to break this section down, and I confess that we're going to touch it somewhat lightly; but I think you'll get the main point.

I have said many times that nonbelievers don't believe the Bible, can't believe the Bible, have no interest in the Bible. It's not only unclear to them, it's obscure; they have no ability to understand it. So they don't understand us, how we can be so passionately committed to the Word of God and love it so much and love obeying it for the sake of the love that we have for the One who died for us and rose again. They don't understand it. And on the surface I understand why. Let me give you some reasons why non-Christians don't believe the Bible, okay.

Let's go back to verse 18 of chapter 1. "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing." Foolishness. The message's first point is unreasonable. It's foolishness. The Greek word is – this will sound familiar – moron. It's stupid, pointless. The idea, the idea that God, the one true and eternal God, became a Jewish man, lived in Israel, was rejected by His people, crucified by the Romans, rose from the dead, and is the world's only Savior was unreasonable. That's what the early Christians were preaching throughout the Roman world. The crucified Jew rejected by His own people and rejected by the Romans and executed as a common criminal is the eternal God and the Savior of the world. That's just unreasonable. It's foolishness. How do you convince somebody of that?

Put yourself in the position of a believer in the first century going into the Gentile world and saying, "I want to tell you about a man named Jesus who is God incarnate, born in absolute obscurity, in a manger laid, lived in a nondescript town called Nazareth, was totally rejected by His own nation as a false Messiah, handed over to the Romans and executed. And He's the eternal God and only Savior, and He is going to reign over the earth and His kingdom forever. This is moronic. Its message is unreasonable.

Look at verse 19. Its truth is also unattainable, verse 19: "For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" And then this important verse: "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." Now let me just give you an overview of that.

It's verse 19 where we start, and that's a quote from Isaiah 29:14. Isaiah had said when Sennacherib the Assyrian king was threatening the southern kingdom of Judah, Isaiah said, deliverance will come for Judah, but that deliverance will not come by the wisdom of the leaders. It will not come by the wisdom of the sages of Judah. It will not come because of their strength or because of their cunning or because of their craftiness; but God, by His wisdom would save Judah from Sennacherib. And Paul borrows that: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside."

It's God who delivers, and apart from God delivering, there is no deliverance. It can't come from the wise men. Look at verse 20. This is also alluding to a couple of passages in Isaiah. "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Take all the supposed wise counselors of Israel and they were fools. All the wise counselors of Judaism, they were fools. All the wise counselors of any nation, any people at any level, and they are fools; which is to say that as smart and wise as they may think they are – like Romans 1, "Professing to be wise they're foolish" – they cannot attain to the truth.

That is what verse 21 then sums up: "In the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God." You can't get to God through human wisdom. So, I say again: we understand. We understand the word of the cross, the gospel is unattainable. It is unreasonable and unattainable; you can't get there on your own.

And then, thirdly, the apostle Paul says its claims are actually unattractive. They're actually unattractive. They aren't what people are looking for. Look at verse 22: "For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness." You see the verb "ask" and the verb "search." The Jews are seeking for a sign, Luke 11:16, "Show us a sign from heaven," they said. They wanted a big sign. They wanted, I think, a sign in the sky, a sign that Jesus was their Messiah, that He had come to fulfill the messianic promise, and that He would conquer all of Israel's enemies and establish His glorious kingdom in Jerusalem, and Israel would be elevated.

In Matthew chapter 12, Jesus confronted this desire for a sign. Matthew chapter 12, verse 38: "Some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.' He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'" Jesus said, "You want a sign? I'm going to be buried, but only for three days. You want a sign? I'll give you a sign. The sign will be the resurrection."

They wanted a sign, they got a sign: the resurrection. When they went to the tomb, it was what? It was empty. The graveclothes were lying where they would have been when they

were wrapped around His body. The stone was rolled away. And there were eyewitnesses: the women saw Him. And the apostles then saw Him, and He was with them for forty days. And then the Holy Spirit came and the church was established on the basis of the death and resurrection of the Redeemer Jesus Christ. In spite of that, the Jews rejected. And when the apostles in the book of Acts went out to preach the resurrection they put them in jail.

The Jews wanted a sign. They wanted a different sign than they got because there was nothing in them. There was no faculty in them that could believe. It was too contrary to what their expectations were.

On the other hand, the Greeks searched for wisdom. That's a simple phrase. But if you go back and look at Greek philosophy you find that it is rather intricate, complicated, profound. Oratory was a big part of it, putting people through sort of mental mazes with your erudition. Esoteric kind of concepts were what appealed to the Greeks; and they laughed at a God who was crucified by the Romans. The whole thing was utterly ridiculous to the Jews and the Greeks.

So, there are some barriers here. The gospel, the word of the cross, is unreasonable. It is unattainable. It is beyond their ability to process. That is because they don't get what they want. It doesn't give them what they want. The Jews wanted a sign; the Greeks wanted wisdom. Jesus offered a sign, His resurrection, and He offered wisdom about sin and repentance and salvation, not a message they cared to hear.

This is all compounded further because the people are also unremarkable. If you had a message like this so hard to sell, it might help to put it in the hands of famous people. I think sometimes Christians assume that, that if we could just have famous people affirming Christ, this would get past the resistance. But that's not what God designed. Verse 23: "We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, to Gentiles foolishness." Verse 25: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

So how do we overcome this? Look at verse 26 to 28: "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the

world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are.”

“Not many,” three times: not many, not many, not many. Here’s the problem: the people who are proclaiming the gospel are unremarkable. The majority of believers are unimpressive.

Look at how Paul piles up these statements of insignificance. “Not many wise, not many mighty,” – that is, powerful, influential – “not many noble,” – that means high born literally, high social rank. And then he goes on to say in verse 27, “But God has chosen the foolish” – the uneducated, the morons – “to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak” – the uninfluential. And then he goes even deeper, verse 28, “and the base things,” *agenēs*, low born, insignificant. And then he goes even lower, “the despised.” That is a verb that means to be considered as next to nothing. So we’re not wise. We’re not powerful. We are foolish. We are weak. We are low born, insignificant people who are to be considered as next to nothing. And he ends it up by saying, “things that are not.” That’s the present participle for the verb “to be” *eimi*, nonexistent. We don’t exist. This is the most contemptible expression in the Greek language: those who don’t even exist. In the secular world, in the unconverted world, we don’t even exist. Lowlifes. So God gave us an impossible message: to preach to incapable people. And we ourselves are nobody.

Well, you say, “There’s some pretty effective preachers, aren’t there?” There are. Some of the nobodies are effective in their preaching. But look at chapter 2, verse 1: “When I came to you, brethren, I didn’t come with superiority of speech or of wisdom proclaiming to you the testimony of God. So here’s the fifth problem: The preachers are unfashionable. The preachers are unfashionable, and therefore they are essentially unacceptable.

“I didn’t come with superiority of speech. I didn’t come with wisdom. Rather, I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power.” They were used to those sophists who had mastered labyrinth of language, and Paul to them was a lowlife. Second Corinthians 10:10, he acknowledges that they said his speech was contemptible. He lacked the mental sophistication, the philosophical complexity, the esoteric cleverness of persuasive words of wisdom.

A fallen mind can't get past all this. Man's wisdom admittedly can do some amazing things: science, technology, genetics, medicine, industry, arts, culture – all kinds of things. Man's wisdom will not get him to God. The gospel is not available, not available. This wisdom is too high. It's in another sphere. It's in another dimension.

Well, you say, "How does someone come to know this?" Go back to the end of chapter 1. How do we know what we know? Verse 30, "By His doing you're in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God." What? How did you come to know that? How did all us nobodies comes to know this? By His doing.

Let me take you back to verse 18: "The word of the cross" – the end of the verse – "to those who are being saved is the power of God." Verse 24: "To those who are the called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. To those who are being saved," – and who are those who are being saved? – "those who are called." Did you hear that? This is an effectual call. This is when God calls the dead sinner to life. This is a sovereign act.

And consider your calling – I love this – verse 27: "God has chosen, God has chosen." Verse 28: "God has chosen." Why do you believe? Because you were chosen, and you were called with an efficacious call out of death into life. That's why verse 29 says, "You cannot boast, because it's by God's doing that you're in Christ Jesus." Verse 31: "You boast only in the Lord."

We're not smarter than anybody else. We're not more spiritual. We're not better people. We're as wretched as any and all sinners are. But we've been chosen; and then we've been called; and then we are being saved – sovereignly, supernaturally.

If you're in the kingdom, it's not because you had more wisdom than people who aren't. It's because you were chosen, you were called, and you were saved. "So," – Paul says – "I don't need to come with superiority of speech or wisdom, I just come preaching Christ and Him crucified; and based upon the hearing of the gospel, God saves those whom He has chosen. So my message and my preaching are in the demonstration of the Spirit, and of power."

Verse 5: "Our faith doesn't rest on the wisdom of men, but on" – what? – "the power of God." What happened? God came to us in power and gave us life out of death. So, verse 6,

“We do speak wisdom among those who are mature,” – or complete – “a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; God’s wisdom in a mystery, hidden from everybody else, hidden wisdom which God” – what’s the next word? – “predestined before the ages to our glory. You were predestined, you were chosen, you were called, you were saved, and that’s why you believe the Bible and the gospel.

Paul goes on to say it was the Holy Spirit who revealed it to us. Go down to verse 10: “For to us God revealed them through the Spirit.” How do we know the truth of the gospel? How do we know things which eye has not seen, ear has not heard, not available through any empirical human faculty? How do we know the things that have never entered the heart of man? They’re neither empirical or intuitive. How do we know all that God has prepared for those that love Him? To us, God revealed them through the Spirit. So here you understand the full range of redemption. You are predestined, you are chosen, you are called, you are saved, and you are granted the wisdom of God.

In verse 14 he says, “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, they’re foolishness to him; he cannot understand them, they are spiritually appraised, and he’s spiritually dead.” But he closes out in verse 16: “But we have” – what? – “the mind of Christ.” Is that not amazing? We know the thoughts of our Lord because the Spirit is in us. We have an anointing from God, John says. We don’t need human teachers, we have an anointing from God; that anointing is the Holy Spirit, and He teaches us all things.

So we’re the nobodies, we get it. We’re the nothings. We’re the nonexistent. We’re the low of the low. But we have the wisdom of God because God in His grace and mercy called us. I love what Martin Luther said: “Man is like a pillar of salt, like Lot’s wife. Yes,” – Luther said – “a log, or a stone, like a lifeless statue which uses neither eyes nor mouth, neither sense nor heart, until he is regenerated by the Holy Spirit.”

So we come. As always, we come to worship. We’re here today not because we want to be a problem in this society. We are the answer, not the problem. We’re here because we want to worship the God who gave us life and wisdom. If you don’t have that, pray the prayer of Psalm 25:5, “Lead me in Your truth, for You are the God of my salvation.” Pray Psalm 119:18, “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of Your law.” Ask God to give you light and to give you life. It only comes from Him. By His doing – back in chapter 1,

verse 30 – “You are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” Ask God for those things. Cry out to God for divine wisdom to understand the gospel, for righteousness to be accredited to you, imputed to you, the very righteousness of Christ that becomes yours through faith. Ask God to purge you from sin, to buy you back from death and hell. That’s the only hope a sinner has. Can’t do it on your own, you have to ask. And Jesus said, “Whoever comes to Me I will never turn away,” right?