Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Exclusiveness of the Gospel, Part 1
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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We have been studying the gospel of Luke, but we have had a few interruptions through the Christmas season; and prior to that, I interrupted our study of the gospel of Luke, or rather I hope enhanced our study of the gospel of Luke, with a series on deliverance. That series has been widely heard and will continue to be, and I'm very grateful for that. There was one element to that series that I really left out. And so I want to address that this morning and next Lord's day morning, and then we'll get back to our study of Luke. When you do Bible exposition the way that I do, you get into a book, you stay a long time. And so issues arise that have to be addressed, and so sometimes we have to take a bit of a rabbit trail away from the main road in order to deal with an issue, and this is a very, very pertinent issue.

It would seem that everybody in evangelical Christianity, everybody who is truly a Christian, would understand that the gospel is the heart of Christianity, and that the gospel is found only in the Scripture, and that the gospel must be preached to the ends of the earth. I grew up understanding that. My theological education affirmed it. My years of studying the Bible has sealed that affirmation. The heart of the Christian faith is the gospel. The gospel is found in the New Testament. The foundations of the gospel are found in the Old Testament. And the gospel must be preached to the ends of the earth if people are to be saved. That's essentially the Christian mission. That's what the church has believed. That has compelled its life. That has been its mandate. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in My name and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." He said it another way. He said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

That has been the church's mandate. True Christians have always believed that. The true church has always taught that. We have believed, and been compelled by, the fact that if people don't hear the gospel, they can't be saved, and if they aren't saved, then they'll spend eternity in hell under the judgment of God. So it is absolutely critical that the world hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. That they not only hear it but that they understand it accurately, that they believe it, that they embrace it for themselves, because it is the only saving truth.

Compelled by this clear biblical mandate, Christians through the centuries have taken the saving message to the ends of the earth. Generation after generation, they have been engaged in doing this. Preaching the gospel to every person on earth has been the goal of the church. I have told you many times that that's the only reason we're still here. We're already saved and sealed for eternity. There's

no reason to leave us here except for this responsibility of evangelism.

Now, we believe that the Bible is very clear that salvation comes through believing in Christ. Believing in Christ comes from hearing and understanding the gospel. Being able to hear and understand the gospel can only occur if somebody takes the message. And somebody can only take the message if they're sent with it. And that's what Romans 10 says, "You're saved by believing in Christ, but you can't believe in Christ unless you hear about Christ. You can't hear about Christ unless somebody preaches. And somebody is not going to preach unless they're sent." And that is our mandate, and that has been the mission of the church since the church was born on Pentecost and Jesus said, "You'll receive the Holy Spirit, and you'll be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth." Since the church was launched till today, uncounted millions of dollars, in every currency on the map of the world, and millions of hours of effort and work, and millions of Christian people through the centuries have been spent and sacrificed to take the only message of salvation to the edges of the earth. Translation work – rigorous, difficult, challenging work, of taking a language that isn't even written, and developing an alphabet, and developing a way to write that language, and then teaching the people to read their own language when they've never even seen it; and then giving them the scriptures and the gospel, and leading them to Christ – rigorous work that takes decades. And then printing materials in every language, preaching, teaching, evangelizing – that's what the church has been engaged in since its calling, since the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. An unrelenting effort to use every means available to reach people with the only message that can save them from eternal judgment, and that's the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And here we are now at the start of the new millennium – this is the official start, the year 2001. And at the start of this new millennium we have greater means to take the gospel to the ends of the world than we've ever had. Technology, a sophistication in the application of that technology to every imaginable medium of communication, has given us greater power now than ever to bring the gospel to the end of the earth. And isn't it amazing that at this point in time, the enemy of men's souls, the enemy of God, the arch rival of God, Satan himself, has cranked up his efforts to prevent this. He's done it in a couple of interesting ways. One is to make the church confused about what the gospel is. And over the last fifteen years this has been a battle that I've been engaged in with some others, to try to make sure that Christian people understand what the gospel is. It doesn't do any good to have the technology, it doesn't do any good to have the opportunity, it doesn't do any good to have the financial means, it doesn't do any good to have the manpower to take the message to the ends of the earth, if you don't know what the message is. And so it's certainly a very wise strategy on the part of the enemy of men's souls to confuse the church about the message.

So along with many others, I've been engaged in writing books to try to clarify for Christians, quote/unquote, what the gospel is, because the church has become confused about the gospel. They're not really sure whether Jesus is Lord or not; whether He needs to be Lord or not. It doesn't

seem to be important to the church anymore that people understand the true biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone, grace alone, in Christ alone. It doesn't seem to be important to some people that there's repentance of sin and that we preach repentance. In fact, some people think that's some kind of an intrusion into grace. There's a failure to understand the doctrine of substitution and imputation, that is the true understanding that our sins were imputed fully to a substitute who died in our place, and that we contribute nothing to our salvation except faith in that substitute.

So here we are as an evangelical church confused about the message, and you hear, as I mentioned a few weeks ago, a pastor of a very large evangelical church make a statement like, "The Reformation was overrated as to its importance." Well, what the Reformation did was define the gospel. Not only do we not know what the gospel is, largely; we're not even sure it's important to get it right. That's a tragic thing. Here we are on the brink of really the greatest potential to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth, and we're not sure what it is. And the church in the process has gotten shallower and shallower. There are a number of reasons why. One of them is because churches have proliferated everywhere, honestly, that are being pastored by men who are unskilled, untrained, and don't have the theological background to be able to define things biblically and with any depth. Another is there is this concern not to offend anybody, make church fun and entertaining, and so we create some kind of synthetic gospel that doesn't have enough truth in it to save anybody.

Now, all of that is bad enough, and we've tried to address that. But there's a new wave in the evangelical world that is at least as frightening, if not more frightening. And the new wave in the evangelical world is this: there are some people who are telling us it isn't necessary to even take the gospel to the ends of the earth. It's not necessary. People are being saved without it – without it. Now, this view has some labels. Let me just give you a little teaching here. This is a theology class for a few minutes. You can handle it, I know. If I can understand it, you can understand it. What is the name for this – this idea that somebody can get saved, somebody can get into the Kingdom of God, somebody can go to heaven without the gospel? This is one name, natural theology – that is, that man naturally can ascend to a knowledge of God, can ascend to a relationship to God, can ascend by his reason and his innate desire to do what is right to complying with God's will. This is natural. That is to say opposite of supernatural.

Supernatural theology says God has to come down and save man; natural theology says man can climb up to God. That's he can approach God on the natural level. This is to say that man has the natural reasoning process and power to come to God to be saved without the Scripture. Advocates say mankind may discover the existence of God, he may discover the attributes of God, he may discover the nature of God by human reason apart from scriptural revelation. Man is capable of knowing God, knowing the truth about God, and knowing God's will without the Bible. His reason is sufficient. Now, obviously, to believe that, you could not have a Reformed view of depravity; you would have to believe that man has not only innate reasoning power but innate goodness to pursue that, to pursue righteousness; so people who advocate this have a flawed view of man's depravity.

But what they advocate is that man can make it to heaven without the Bible. He can make it to heaven without the gospel. So what's all the missionary fuss about? You don't need repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, as Paul said he had to preach in Acts 20. The lost do not need to hear the gospel. They don't need to have a Bible. We don't need all this translation work. We don't need all these people sacrificing their lives in remote areas with small tribes of people to try to get them the Bible and the Word of God and the gospel that saves, because they can be saved without it.

A couple of weeks ago I quoted from the *LA Times*, December 9 quote from the Pope, just to show you that the Catholic Church believes this. Pope John Paul II said this week "that all who live a just life will be saved, even if they do not believe in Jesus Christ and the Roman Catholic Church." The Pope went on to say, quote: "The gospel teaches us that those who live in accordance with the Beatitudes, poor in spirit, the pure of heart, those who bear lovingly the sufferings of life, will enter God's Kingdom," end quote. The Pope is taking an inclusive view of salvation. The biblical teaching that salvation only comes in response to faith in Jesus Christ is rejected as unreasonable and cruel by people who believe this. The heathen are saved if they just live good lives, if they're just poor in spirit, if they are pure in heart and if they pursue what is right. If they live good lives and they are sincere, it doesn't really matter what they believe.

That is why Catholic apologist Peter Kreeft, who wrote the book *Ecumenical Jihad,* can say that there are Buddhists, and there are Hindus, and there are Confucianists, and there are Muslims, and there are atheists, and there are orthodox Jews, all in heaven because Christ is not the issue, the gospel is not the issue, the Bible is not the issue, sincerity and goodness is the issue. And this is the natural theology idea that man by his natural powers – his reasoning powers, and some innate goodness – can ascend to the knowledge of God, and the will of God, and please God, and earn salvation, whether he ever sees a Bible or ever hears about Jesus Christ, the Pope simply affirming what Catholic theology has long believed.

This is somehow motivated by some human conception of fairness. It's not fair, somehow, for somebody somewhere not to be able to be saved when they don't have immediate access to the gospel. But it's not just a Catholic view, and I'm going to reiterate something I read to you a few weeks ago, because I want it on this tape. There was an interview that was held between Robert Schuller and Dr. Billy Graham on the "Hour of Power." I have the transcript of that conversation. The conversation went like this. Dr. Schuller said, "Tell me, what is the future of Christianity?" Dr. Graham said, "I think there's the body of Christ, which comes from all the Christian groups around the world, or outside the Christian groups. I think everybody that loves Christ or knows Christ, whether they're conscious of it or not, they're members of the body of Christ. And I don't think that we're going to see a great sweeping revival that will turn the whole world to Christ at any time." In other words, what he is saying is there are people in the body of Christ who have never heard of Christ, so we don't need to expect that they're all going to come to Christ. They're going to come another way.

Further, he says, “God’s purpose for this age is to call out a people for His name, and that’s what God is doing today. He’s calling people out of the world for His name. Whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world, or the Christian world, or the non-believing world, they are members of the body of Christ because they’ve been called by God. They may not even know the name of Jesus, but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don’t have and they turn to the only light they have, and I think they’re saved, and they’re going to be with us in heaven.” Dr. Schuller responded, “What I hear you saying is that it’s possible for Jesus Christ to come into a human heart, and soul, and life, even if they’ve been born in darkness, and have never heard, and never had exposure to the Bible. Is that a correct interpretation of what you’re saying?” Dr. Graham: “Yes, it is, because I believe that. I’ve met people in various parts of the world in tribal situations. They have never seen a Bible or heard about a Bible, have never heard of Jesus, but they’ve believed in their hearts that there is a God, and they’ve tried to live a life that was quite apart from the surrounding community in which they lived.” Dr. Schuller: “This is fantastic. I’m so thrilled to hear you say that. There is a wideness in God’s mercy.” Dr. Graham: “There is, there certainly is.”

This has certainly leaped from Aristotle to the Catholic Church into the evangelical Protestantism. Now we have a kind of Protestant viewpoint that says Muslims, and Hindus, and whoever, are going to be in the body of Christ, in the Kingdom, in heaven with salvation, whether they ever get a Bible, or whether they ever hear the gospel, or whether they ever know about Jesus Christ. The Billy Graham Organization affirmed this position as the same as the one articulated in an article in *Decision* magazine which Billy wrote in 1960, so this is not something new. Now, this introduces us to the sort of evangelical side of this, and there’s a term being used today to describe it. It’s called the wider mercy view, which is a little easier to handle than the natural theology view – the idea that man in his depraved condition can find God, find God’s will, live a righteous life, and please God is – that’s impossible to prove by Scripture. So rather than posture yourself as a natural theologian, you’d rather be a supernatural theologian, so you come up with another title, the wider mercy view, that there’s this wider latitude, there’s this inclusive view in which the Lord is going to include everybody. And what it essentially says is that people can be saved in any religion.

Clark Pinnock, when I was a student in seminary, he wrote a book called *Set Forth Your Case*, which was really a fine Christian apologetic, a Christian evidentialism book. He was, you know, a great champion for the Christian faith. He has since wandered far away and apostatized from that, to the point where he now is probably the leading proponent of this wider mercy view. And I’ll quote, he says this, “When we approach the man of faith other than our own” – somebody in another religion – “it will be in a spirit of expectancy, to find out how God has been speaking to him, and what new understanding of the grace and love of God we may ourselves discover in this encounter. Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes – the place we are approaching is holy – else we find ourselves treading on men’s dreams. More, we may forget that God was here before our arrival.” Now, that redefines missions pretty significantly. Instead

of going into a tribe and saying, “These people are lost, these people are doomed, in darkness,” you walk in there and you say you’re standing on holy ground, because God has been there in the form of their paganism. He adds, does Pinnock, “God has more going on by way of redemption than what happened in first century Palestine,” end quote.

I can’t imagine a more disastrous belief than that. God has more going on by way of redemption than what happened in first century Palestine? What does that say? That says that the life, and death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ was just one thing in the midst of many, rather than the single greatest event in all redemptive history. That depreciates Christ. That depreciates His incarnation, His virgin birth, His incarnation, His sinless life, His substitutionary death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension, His intercession, the Second Coming – everything, if Christ is just one among many. This is a regurgitation of an old Greek heresy that the apostle John dealt with called “the universal *logos*,” where the Christ’s spirit is floating around injecting Himself into every religion. It also attacks the trinity, because only biblical Christianity affirms that God is a trinity. Even Mormons deny that.

You say, “This is confusing.” Well, yes. I think I know what you’re thinking, not because I’m omniscient, but because you probably think like I do. And what you’re thinking is how can people believe this? How can they believe this when the Bible says salvation is in Christ alone, right? John 14:6, Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no man comes unto the Father but by Me.” Pretty clear. Acts 4:12, “Neither is there salvation in any other. There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” We know that. Jesus says in John 7, “Because you believe not in Me, you’ll die in your sins, and where I go you’ll never come.” Believing in Jesus – to anybody who reads the New Testament – is the only way to be saved. There’s no other Savior. There’s only one Mediator, says Paul in Timothy. “There’s only one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus” – only one Mediator.

How do they deal with this? Some of these people talk about Jesus every time they’re on the television, every time they get up and speak. What are they talking about? What are they saying? To say Jesus is the only Savior, Jesus is the only Savior, and then to say that Muslims, and Buddhists, and animists, and who knows what all over the place, are all going to be in the body of Christ, and they’re all going to be in the Kingdom, and all going to be in heaven? How does that work? And here is the answer to that. You can find it in the writings of people like Clark Pinnock, and Sanders, and others who write on this. Here’s what they’re saying. They’re saying the work of Christ is the only basis of salvation, but it’s not necessary to know that. In other words, whatever religion you’re in, if you believe in God, however you imagine God to be, and if you try to do what is right, and try to do what’s good and religious, you’re going to be saved by Christ, even though you didn’t know who He was. You didn’t know that God was a trinity. You didn’t know God had revealed Himself in Christ. You didn’t know Christ lived, died, and rose again. You don’t know anything about that, but Christ is still going to be your Savior. He still would have paid the price for your sins. So that they would say He is the only Savior, but He has atoned for and paid the price for the sins of people who will never know

about a Bible and will never know about Jesus Christ. They will still directly benefit from His work on the cross, without ever knowing it.

Mother Teresa was very true to her Catholic faith. I was – my family and I went to visit her when we were in Calcutta. We gave her a copy of the book *The Gospel According To Jesus*, and it was an interesting occasion. She's a very gracious woman, very strong, very gracious little four-foot lady. And the kids wanted to give her this book and so they did, and she said she would read it, but Mother Teresa was very, very true to her Catholic faith. She's a very true Catholic. She understood Catholicism very well. In the front of a Bible which she autographed, she wrote, "May you enter into the heart of Jesus through the Virgin Mary," and signed her name. So she believed that salvation is by virtue of Mary. And that's very true of the Catholic faith. Another thing that was true to the Catholic faith was – we went into her home for the sick and dying in Calcutta. And on the walls were Hindu gods, pictures of the Hindu gods, you know, those multi-armed bizarre gods and deities of the Hindus, on the walls of this Catholic facility. By the way, it was adjacent to, immediately adjacent to the most vile, deviant temple that I have ever seen in my life, anywhere in the world, the temple in Calcutta, the Hindu temple where blood sacrifices are made regularly, even as big as an ox. And there is worship there that I wouldn't even describe in a public setting, it's so deviant. But they're next to each other.

And at the time – I don't think I really understood everything that I now understand – I wondered how she could have pictures of Hindu gods inside her place, which were connected to this deviant place next door. I just assumed that this is political correctness, that if you're going to survive in the city of Calcutta, you've got to do deference to the people that rule the nation of India, and that's what you do. Later came to understand, however, that this was part of their system – part of their system. And I'll tell you how it works. A writer by the name of Raimundo Panikkar has written a book called *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. Isn't that an interesting title? *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. This is what he says. Quote: "The good and bona fide Hindu is saved by Christ and not by Hinduism. But it is through the sacraments of Hinduism, through the message of morality and the good life, through the mysticism that comes down to him through Hinduism that Christ saves the Hindu," end quote.

Everybody's in – good Hindus, good Buddhists, good anybodies, good, you know, people that you see on the Discovery channel, running around with spears and bones through their lip. Everybody is going to be in if they're good. You can understand what an unbelievable thing this is to have intruded into evangelicalism, right? You might be able to live with this if it was coming out of Union Seminary in New York, or if it was coming out of some liberal denomination that had already advocated homosexuality in its clergy, or something like that. But to hear the kind of people who are saying this, and the kind of people like I mentioned sometime back who endorsed Peter Kreeft's book, and J.I. Packer who said, "What if he is right?" And in the book this is the entire thesis that Peter Kreeft has in his book the Evangelical – or *Ecumenical Jihad*. You ask, "How could this get into evangelicalism? How could we succumb to this? How could we buy into this? How could pastors be saying, "Ah, the

Reformation doesn't really matter, and maybe we really need to redefine missions all together all over the world?" But that's exactly what is happening.

Well, all of that to say we have a major problem. And as you know, I not only speak to you, but the Lord has allowed me to speak to a lot of people beyond you, since "Grace To You" is on nearly 2,000 times a day, heard by a lot of people in English, and I think 500 times a day now in Spanish. When we have something we want to say to the evangelical world, we usually get a platform to say it. So just felt that I needed to address this. And you know the way to address this is simply go to the scriptures, right? I mean, I'm not going to give you my opinion; my opinion isn't worth anything. Well, what does the Bible have to say about this? Do we have a biblical case for the exclusivism? Do we have a case for the fact that if you don't know the gospel, and if you don't believe in Jesus Christ, you aren't going to heaven? The answer to that is yes. And we have a biblical case for the fact that natural theology isn't going to get anybody anywhere. And we also have a biblical case that God's mercy is extremely narrow. In fact, if you're looking for the word "narrow," you're going to find it in Matthew 7. "It is a" – what kind of gate – "narrow gate." So this is a narrow mercy and a supernatural theology, and that's what I want to show you from Scripture.

Now where are we going to start? Well, we're going to start by a general reference, so just sit there; don't get into your Bible right now, just listen for a minute. This is a general reference to Genesis 3, but I don't want you to go there because you'll be looking for verses, and I'm not going to refer, I'm only going to do it in a general way. Genesis 3, you know what happened in Genesis 3, right? Genesis 1 and 2 is creation. Genesis 3 is the Fall of man. Man is created in the image of God, and then God creates a partner, Eve. So we have Adam and Eve, and they're in a condition of perfection. They have perfect bodies, perfect minds, therefore they have perfect reason. Okay? They live in a perfect environment that is not at all skewed, and they have a perfect relationship with the Creator. So this is perfection. Okay? We're in the garden in a perfect environment.

They had perfect minds, capable of perfect understanding, capable of perfect reason, capable of perfect conclusions. Still Adam and Eve in the state of perfection could not, on their own, understand why they were created. They could understand that they were created; they could understand that something more powerful than them created them, and something with an immense mind, some being that loved beauty, and loved order, and loved design, and had power, and gave life, and all of that. But they couldn't know why they were created. They couldn't know what they were to do, what they were not to do, how they were to do it, unless there was somebody who told them. They wouldn't know how to respond to their environment, how to function in the garden. So God said to them, "You can eat everything," otherwise they wouldn't have known that. And He said, "Don't eat that, if you do you'll die." And He said, "This is your wife, have babies." And He said, "Name those animals." That's why they were walking and talking with God in the garden, because God was giving them special revelation about how they were to relate to Him, and how they were to relate to their world.

Natural theologians should be shocked to discover that Adam couldn't know divine truth by his perfect reason. He couldn't by his own reason, his own perfect intellect, he couldn't have come to know that he was not to eat this and to eat this, that he was to name the animals, et cetera, et cetera. That he was to tend the garden. God had to tell him all of that. Robert Morey says, "Adam was not created to be the origin of truth, justice, morals, meaning, and beauty. The Creator walked with man in the garden. These daily sessions were special revelation. And God told man why He created him and what he was to do in the garden. He revealed to man what he could and couldn't eat." In other words, God was the origin and source of truth, justice, morals, meaning, and beauty, and man's responsibility was to receive what God revealed. Man was not the origin but the receiver of truth.

And it's true Adam and Eve would have known something about God, but they wouldn't have known what God wanted from them if He hadn't told them. We wouldn't even understand man's pre-fall condition. We wouldn't understand his fallen condition, if it wasn't for Genesis 1, 2 and 3. Do you know, you can study the religions of the world, the philosophers of the world, the theologians of the world, none of them ever comes up with the right understanding of man's creation and man's depravity – none of them. They don't ever – because you can't get there from depraved reasoning.

And remember this, that when Satan got in the garden, perfect man, with the perfect mind, perfect understanding, perfect reasoning – in that condition, Satan comes in, and what does he want Adam and Eve to distrust? Their reason. He says to them, "Has God said – you can't trust God's Word." See, what Satan always wants us to do is to distrust special revelation and trust our reason. And Satan's leading Eve through this little scenario. Finally he says, "Ah, you're not going to die. You can't believe God. God lies. God said that? You're going to die? Nah, you're not going to die, you're going to be like God. He doesn't like that competition." Satan tempted man to trust his reason and reject revelation from the mouth of God.

God gave them special revelation – "Don't eat." Satan said, "Don't believe what God says, trust your reason." That's essentially what natural theology says. It's just the lie of Satan in the garden, over, and over, and over again. You can get there through your reason. Don't worry about the Bible. Don't worry about the gospel. You don't need that. You can get there by your own reason. But look, how could fallen man in a cursed world find God's truth by his perverted reason, when perfect man in a perfect world couldn't find God with perfect reason? Adam couldn't know what God wanted if God didn't tell him, and nobody else can know what God wants if God doesn't tell him. And we're in worse shape than Adam and Eve. And Satan always does the same thing – he always wants to depreciate the special revelation. What a great strategy. Let's convince the church they don't even need to preach the gospel. Tell me where that came from. Heaven? Tell me where that heresy came from. Who has the most at stake to get us to stop preaching the gospel?

Well, let's look at Romans 1. I have time for two quick passages; I have about eight and we'll finish them next time. Now, just stay with me, because this is very important and I'm going to go through here rapidly. Romans 1:18 to 23; this is one of those monumental passages in the Bible that's extremely definitive, has far-reaching implications. I want you to see man, this is a view of man; this is a biblical anthropology. And it says in verse 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed in heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

We'll stop there. Familiar to many of us. Now, let me kind of lay this out. The Bible here is saying that there is evidence about God, verse 19, "What is known about God is evident within them," and that's through reason. Reason looks in verse 20 at the creation, and says, "There must be a creator." Reason looks at the diversity, and says, "He must have an immense mind." It looks at the design, and says, "He's a God of order." Looks at the beauty, and says, "He's a God of beauty, and harmony, and all of that." It looks at vast variety, and says, "He's a God of immense power and complexity."

Yes, that's true. So in fact, it's so true and so clear that eternal power and divine nature are visible through reason looking at creation, that it's clearly seen, verse 20, "it's clearly seen." You'd have to be – you really do have to commit intellectual suicide to deny there is a cause for the effect of the universe, that there is a creator. So it's just clearly seen. And so clearly seen, at the end of verse 20, that people have no excuse – you have absolutely no excuse for being an evolutionist – none. It's absolute idiocy. It's moronic, and he uses the term here for moron, translated "fool" or "foolish." Anybody who sees anything that exists assumes somebody made it. And the universe certainly demands a creator. So he says God has given man in him reason, and reason looks at creation and concludes certain things about the power and nature of the creator, and he's without excuse.

The problem is this: it doesn't lead him to God. Amazing; it doesn't lead him to God. It does not lead him to the true God. Why? Back to verse 18, "He suppresses the truth in unrighteousness." Man is so wicked, he is so depraved, he is so vile in his nature, he is so ungodly, that his depravity negates the possibility of him coming all the way to God on his own natural powers; rather, he suppresses the truth. He dishonors the creator, look at verse 21, even though the knowledge of God is obvious around him as creator, he doesn't know the specifics about God's will or salvation, but at least he can see there's a creator. But he will not honor him as a creator. He will not be thankful to him. This is what depraved man does. I mean you have even Adam doing this, dishonoring God by disobeying God, turning from special revelation to follow his own human reason in an act of pride. But here he

says they do not honor God, they do not give thanks to God. They turn away from God. They suppress the truth, and so what they come up with is they become futile, that's empty, in their speculations. They come up with stupid ideas that aren't true, like evolution, which is a big lie. It's not true, or any human philosophy, or any false religion. They invent empty human ideas that are not reality, and their foolish heart goes dark. There's no light. They end up with nothing but garbled understanding.

Verse 22, in their egotism, which is a major part of depravity, they profess to be wise, give themselves PhDs, and put on royal and religious robes and cone hats, and march around as if they're some great religious wise men. They are fools. They are morons, in the Greek. They are ridiculous. In fact, it doesn't stop there. Verse 23, "They exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man, birds and four-footed animals and snakes and bugs." They make gods out of other things. That's where they end up, worshiping bugs, worshiping men, worshiping whatever. That's where they go. Natural man, that's how he goes. Oh, his reason says there must be a God, must be a creator, must be powerful, must be complex. But because they're so wicked, because they're so depraved – and I'll say more about that next week – they suppress that truth; because of the love of sin they depress that truth. They can't help but suppress it, they don't have any path to God, they can't get out of their deadness. They're dead in trespasses and sins. They're not alive to God. They're not alive to reality. In that deadness, the truth is suppressed. Righteousness is suppressed, and in its place comes the fabrication of false religious systems and empty stupid philosophies.

And the end of all of that, what's the end of all that? What's the end of human philosophy and human religion? You say the grace of God. No – no. Verse 18, what does it say? "For" – what – "the wrath of God." That's the whole point here. What these verses are telling us is that natural man, with his natural theology, unaided by special revelation, winds up inexcusably under divine judgment. It's the wrath of God. It's not the grace of God. You can't go over to some tribe that's worshiping an alligator or something and say, "Oh, I'm on holy ground, God was here before I arrived." God was not there. God is not there. That is not truth. That is not reality. That is a refusal to honor the true and living God, the incorruptible God, and in His place to stick something else, to fabricate something else, some empty philosophy, some foolish religion, or some idol. So that's where natural man goes.

Romans 1 is the diagnosis of natural man. He becomes religious, but his religion is a descent, not an ascent. It is not an ascent to God; it is a descent from the first recognition of God as creator of the universe down to a false god, being created by their own imagination, in the suppression of the truth, and the love of their own wickedness. And what happens is they don't end up with the grace of God, they don't end up, quote, unquote, in the body of Christ, by any stretch of the imagination; they end up under the wrath of God. The wrath of Almighty God is judgment – judgment.

One other passage I want to show you, 1 Corinthians 1, because it partners with this one, and just a brief look at this one. First Corinthians 1 – what we saw in Romans 1 is when man attains to his highest level of religious pride, he is a moron, he is a fool under wrath. It doesn't matter whether his religion is unsophisticated animism, or very sophisticated western kind of religion, or eastern kind of religion, he ends up in the same place. He's a fool who thinks he's wise. But let's go beyond that, 1 Corinthians 1:18, "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing" what? You see, these fools think that what we preach is foolish. They think that the cross is foolish. "But to us who are being saved, it's the power of God." And here comes another judgment, and this is a verse taken from Isaiah, chapter 29 and verse 14, "For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.'" Both of those, "destroy" and "set aside," speak of sort of a final judgment, execution. God says, "Go ahead, line up the wisest of the wise, line up the cleverest of the clever, and I'll cut them down."

Again, what happens to people who achieve religious wisdom, who achieve a high level of rational understanding of, quote, unquote, God and things spiritual, what happens is God's going to cut them down. It's the same thing as the wrath of Romans 1:18; here it's destruction and setting aside, making into nothing. And then verse 20 says, "Where is the wise man going to be?" This is almost sarcasm. "Then where is the scribe going to be, the one who spends his whole life fastidiously writing out religious things? Where is the debater of this age, the person who can stand up and debate his philosophy and his theology? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Take the wisest of the wise, take the wisdom of the world, take the elite religious leaders, take the people at the top echelons of their religion, whether you're talking about the Pope, or whether you're talking about the leader of Hinduism, or the Muslim world, or whether you're talking about the apostles in the Mormon church, or whatever you're talking about. Take them all, all of those who have reached the epitome of man's devised schemes of religion, the wise, the scribes, the great writers and theologians, the debaters, the people who can argue their point and win the day, all those people, all of them God is going to make fools. They're not going to get grace. Do you get the point? They're going to get cut down.

And the reason is in verse 21, this is the key, "For since in the wisdom of God" – by God's wisdom – "the world through its wisdom did not come to know God" – mark that down, underline that. You can't get there from here. The world at its best, at its highest point of religious achievement and intellectual achievement, the world at its wisest level can't come to know God. That's what it says; can't do it. And then the end of verse 21, "God was pleased through the foolishness of the message preached" – what message – the gospel – "to save those who believe." "The message" goes back to the message of the cross in verse 18. The only way you're going to get saved is by believing the message of the cross. That's the only way. It was God's plan that the world through its wisdom couldn't come to know Him. I'll say it again – you can't get to God from here by your own wisdom, rationality, religiosity, philosophy. But God was pleased through the foolishness of the message, the message of the cross, Christ, His death, His resurrection, to save those who – what – who believe. It's not believe in

anything, but believe that. And the gospel of the cross is not a product of human reason, it's a revelation – it's a revelation.

Where do you go for the revelation of the cross? Right here, isn't this what explains it? Oh, Satan loves to come into the garden today and pull people over, and say, "You don't really think you should believe what special revelation from God says. Trust your own reason – trust your own reason." That's what these theologians are doing. They're just following Satan. Only the message of the cross can save, anything else is *mria*, moronic.

Jeremiah 8:9 says, "The wise men are put to shame. They are dismayed and caught. Behold, they have rejected the Word of the Lord." And what kind of wisdom do they have? You reject the revealed Word of God, you reject special revelation, you reject the Word of the Lord, and what kind of wisdom have you got? Well, James answers the question. James 3:15, "The wisdom that doesn't come down from above is demonic." Pretty straight, isn't it? It's not just wrong, it's not just foolish, it's demonic. Listen, if it doesn't come down from above, it comes up from below. And that's why Paul, down in chapter 2, verse 2 – well, verse 1 – "When I came to you, brethren, I didn't come with superiority of speech or wisdom; I didn't come with human ideas, reason." Verse 2, "I determined to know nothing among you except" – what – "Christ." He said that's all I wanted to say. Why? Because that's the only message that does – what – that saves. That's the only message to preach because that's the only way of salvation. When I brought to you the testimony of God, when I unfolded for you the mystery of God, what had been hidden and is now revealed, when I brought to you the Word of God, it was all about Jesus and Him crucified, because it's only by believing that that God is well pleased to save.

So now where are the wise men? Nowhere. Where are the scribes? Absolutely nowhere. I'm reading a book called *Mormon America*; I'm probably half-way through. It's a four or five-hundred page book. Boy, that's a complex operation, billions of dollars, people coming and going in this complexity of things. Fools – top to bottom. Oh, they've reached all kinds of heights, you know; Ezra Taft Benson, people like that, other senators that we're familiar with today, people in power positions, been in presidential cabinets, they have complex systems of organization in their religion as well as corporately, and it's a huge, big house of cards that God one day is going to blow down. It doesn't mean anything. It doesn't mean anything, absolutely nothing. It's going to be destroyed. They're going to feel nothing but the wrath. You can't get to God through your own system. If you reject Jesus Christ, you can't get there. And you're never going to get there until you hear the message. That's why we've been doing this for all these years. That's why for 2,000 years people have been going to the ends of the earth with a message of Christ, because this is what we know the Bible teaches. Natural man left to himself ends up under the wrath of God, ends up as 1 Corinthians says, under destruction, who is nothing but a fool. And take the wisest of the wise, he says in verse 19, and take the cleverest of the clever, and I'll wipe them all out. It doesn't get you there.

So no person by natural reason, no person by religious intuition can come to know the truth of God. The only way you'll ever know the saving truth of God is by special revelation, and that's the Bible and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Anybody who says people are saved by Hinduism, or by any other religion, anybody who says people are in the body of Christ, and are Christians, and in the Kingdom, and going to heaven who do not believe in Jesus Christ, is not telling you the truth. That's not what the Bible says. So, I'll finish this next week.

Lord, we are again made aware, sadly, of what must break Your heart because it breaks ours; how much more profoundly do You feel the pain of dishonor? But, Lord, we just want to get the record straight and make sure that we have been faithful to discharge our responsibility. And You told us to go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature, so we want to make sure we understand the gospel, and that we keep going, and we don't let these lies, and these deceptions, and these heresies attack Your glorious work. Protect Your church, protect Your people, and keep faithful men who preach the truth in the places of influence, and may Your people hear and understand the truth. Give them discernment so they can sort it out. Give them a love for Your Word so that they have the criteria by which to be discerning. And help us, Lord, to be faithful to share the gospel with everybody that comes across our path, knowing there is no other way to heaven except through faith in the message of Jesus Christ and His cross. And may we preach the cross like Paul did, "determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." And we ask these things in His name. Amen.

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