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

The Exclusiveness of the Gospel, Part 2
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 80-234

Well, as you know, the pattern of ministry here at Grace Church through the years has been to go through books of the Bible, and currently we are supposed to be in the gospel of Luke, and we shall be again next Lord's day, I think. But from time to time, there are issues that are critical for us to understand, to deal with on a biblical level, and we're looking at one last Lord's day and today. And the subject at hand is can the heathen be saved without the gospel? I tried to introduce this a few weeks ago as a very important issue today. I reinforced that last Lord's day and we began what is essentially a two-part study, and I want to continue it today, with some apologies to those of you who weren't here last week. I might encourage you to get the tape which is available this morning, because this is such a critical, critical issue. And also, this is not going to be really like a sermon; this is going to be more like my just giving you some insights from the pertinent scriptures so that you can understand the issue that is before us with regard to the gospel.

And just perhaps a further comment before I actually get into what I've prepared to say to you. If Satan wants to do the greatest damage to the church, then he needs to confuse the church about the gospel, 'cause if we don't know what the gospel is, then we are really ineffective in the world, and he has done a very good job of doing that through the years. The confusion about the gospel reigns not only in liberalism and false forms of Christianity, but confusion about the gospel exists within the quote, unquote, evangelical world today. In fact, evangelicalism has leaped its traditional boundaries and has become so amorphous as to need a new definition. But within the large framework of the amorphous term "evangelical," there is very great confusion about the gospel.

As if that's not bad enough, Satan has added another level of confusion. Not only do we not really understand what the gospel is, but we're not now sure that we even need to preach the gospel, because we're being told today that people can be saved without the gospel, without the knowledge of Jesus Christ, without the Bible. And so not only confused about the gospel, but now confused about the great commission, the church is having its great power eliminated. So we have talked about what the gospel is in a series on deliverance. You remember that – I think six messages, defining what it really means to be a Christian. And now I wanted to give you these two messages on can the heathen be saved without the gospel. Just this latest edition that came this week of "Christianity Today," I was reading it yesterday, and there is a paragraph in a particular article that suggests that we not quibble and argue and fuss about whether God's going to save people without the gospel, but just get on to other things.

Well, there really isn't any other thing as important as preaching the gospel. It's not something trivial. It's not something that could be reduced to quibbling. Whether or not we preach the gospel is a very critical matter, and if Satan can trivialize a clear understanding of the theology of the gospel, and trivialize our understanding of the necessity to preach the gospel, then he has achieved an immense victory. And so we're going to fight back in this series, and we're going to make it very clear from the Scripture as to whether or not heathen people can be saved without the gospel. Jesus Himself said that the door into the eternal Kingdom is narrow – narrow, Matthew 7 – and few there be that find it. Those who advocate this sort of universal salvation through many means and many religions are hard pressed to fit that in to Matthew 7, where Jesus clearly says that the door is very, very obscure; it's hard to find, and it's very narrow so that few find it, and few enter it.

Of course, the New Testament goes on to say the only people who do enter it do so because they believe in and embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. They must know about God. They must know about Christ. They must know what He did. They must believe that and embrace that. Since this is true, clearly the Scripture and the Lord Himself has commanded us in the great commission to take the gospel to every creature, to take the gospel to every person on earth in every generation. And that great commission has been the church's mandate, the church's duty, and the church's passion since Pentecost. But there is this new wave of theology today – or I guess the resuscitation of an old wave of theology – that wants to remove this duty, to remove the necessity for the great commission by stating that people don't need the Bible, and they may not even need to know about Jesus Christ or the gospel to be saved. This ideology last week I labeled, as some have labeled it, is natural theology; that man by natural means – that is human intuition, human reason – can ascend to the knowledge of God. He doesn't need a supernatural revelation coming down; natural reason going up is enough. And he can with his natural reason and his natural religious inclination ascend to a saving knowledge of God, even without the Bible, and without the gospel, and without any knowledge of Jesus Christ. He will experience some kind of faith and some kind of behavior that God will accept as a good enough effort, given the fact that he doesn't know the gospel.

And I showed you that not only has the Roman Catholic Church affirmed this, but now within the framework of leaders in evangelicalism it is being affirmed as well. It says people can be saved in many contexts of religion or in no religion at all if they will just do the best they can with the information they have and with their natural inclination. This is also labeled by some evangelicals as the wider mercy view that says that mercy is wider than we think. We think God's mercy may be confined to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but there is a wider mercy that includes those who don't know anything about the Bible or Jesus Christ. If they just do the best they can with what they've got, they'll be all right. Now, this not only attacks the uniqueness of the triune God – it's only in the Bible that you find God as a trinity – this not only attacks the virgin birth, the incarnation, the sinlessness of Christ, His substitutionary death and atonement, resurrection, ascension, intercession, and Second Coming as if they are just one among many ways to God; it destroys the uniqueness,

therefore, of Scripture. It makes the Bible just one among many.

But does the Bible allow for that? That's the question. You can get there rationally. You can get there philosophically. You can get there emotionally by feeling like it's not fair. And the question always comes up, "Well, what about the people who don't have the message? Well, what about the people who don't have the gospel?" Answer number one, you better get to them with it, because that's what we've been commanded to do. Number two, if God in His sovereign, eternal, elective purpose has determined to bring people to salvation, then He will be sure that they receive the gospel, and we are to be instruments by which that gospel is proclaimed.

We can also conclude from Romans, chapter 1, that if people take the light of creation, the light of the knowledge of God in creation, if they take what has been given them as indicated in Romans 1 and Acts 17, that God is very near to them, and God is manifest in His creation, and if they acknowledge that, and if they recognize by the conscience God has given them, and the law written in their hearts, that they are sinful, and if they have a true desire to know the true God and to have Him deal with their sins, the promise of Scripture is that God will bring the light to that seeking heart. The Old Testament prophet said, "If you seek Me with all your heart, you'll" – what – "find Me." Jesus said it in the Sermon on the Mount, "Seek and you shall find." But there are people who are purveying this heresy within the amorphous boundaries of evangelicalism; that though Jesus is the only Savior – they will say that – and He is the only sacrifice for sin, people will be saved without ever knowing about Him, or knowing about His sacrifice, or even knowing that He existed. And we talked about that last time.

Where do you go to get an answer to this? Not to your emotions, not to your theology self-invented, not to your philosophy, not to your reasoning. There's only one place to go to answer the question, can the heathen be saved without the gospel, and that is to the Bible, right? Let's hear what God has to say. We don't know anything in the spiritual realm in the area of salvation unless we go to the supernatural revelation of God in Scripture. It's not available to us through our intuition or our reason. We can know some things about God. We can know enough to be damned but not enough to be saved. We can know enough to be inexcusable, we can know enough to grope, but we can't know enough to know the truth; that has to come through Scripture, and we'll see that in a moment.

Now, to look at the Scripture – last week we looked at Genesis 3, Romans 1:18 and following, and 1 Corinthians 1:18 to 21. What we saw there was that man, unaided by revelation, unaided by supernatural revelation from God, can't know God's will, can't get to God. In fact, in Romans 1, though he knows God to some degree through his reason, he knows there is a creator, that there is a cause to the effect in which all of the universe exists, he can reason that, he can reason something about God's power, something about His Godhood, something about His morality because of conscience, as Romans 2 says, but he can't get to God. He can only know enough to be without excuse; he can't know enough to be saved, because to know the way of salvation requires the

revelation of the record of salvation in Jesus Christ. And so we saw that all that ends up for the man in Romans 1 is that he takes the knowledge of God, rejects the knowledge of God, becomes a fool, and turns the truth about God into an idol and an image. So he perverts it, and he ends up as an idolater who feels the fury and the wrath of God.

First Corinthians 1 tells us the same thing. The most erudite, the most educated, the most literate, the most elite, the wisest of the wise, when they've reached the epitome of their human reasoning, the human rationalizing, the human religion, end up as fools. First Corinthians 1 says, "The wisdom of man is" – what – "foolishness with God." They don't get to God. It's folly, it's empty, it's useless, and 1 Corinthians 1 says, "Man by wisdom knew not God." You don't get there through natural theology. You don't get there through any process of human reason, intuition, or religion – and we dealt with those passages. Now, I want to take you to some other texts, this morning. Let's turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 2, and again, this is more of a Bible study than a sermon, and I'm really just kind of hitting these scriptures and grabbing some salient elements. I can't go into detail, I don't have time for that; you can read the commentaries I've written on 1 Corinthians, Romans, the book of Acts when we get there, and get more detail. But I want you to look at 1 Corinthians, chapter 2 because there's plenty of insight here to answer our question – can the heathen be saved without the gospel?

The end of verse 10, 1 Corinthians 2, starting at the last half of verse 10 says, "The Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." Here's a simple principle. If we want to know what God thinks, if we want to know the deep things of God, if we want to know the things that are not accessible to us – we can know some things about God. He's powerful, He's a God of order, He's complex, He's a God of beauty, He's a God of life. We can see a lot in the creation, and we can conclude a lot. But if we want to know what's not on the surface, what's not sort of empirically visible, if we want to know the spiritual side of God, we want to know about the law of God, or we want to know about the salvation of God, we want to know about the righteousness of God, the redemption of God, the things that are below the surface, the Spirit searches those things. We have to know that the Spirit of God knows the deep things. Why? Because the Spirit is God, right? The Spirit of God is God, one with God. And so we don't have access to the deep things, we have access only to that which is visible to us, that which is empirical, that which is on the surface, that which is manifest to the human senses. We don't know spiritual things about God, the nature of God, the essence of God, the will of God, the salvation of God. Those things we don't know. The Spirit does know them.

In verse 11, it's sort of an analogy – "Who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?" I don't know your thoughts. You don't know my thoughts. We don't know each other's thoughts. We can be close to each other, we can be married, we can be in the same family, we can be engaged in a common enterprise; we still don't have access to each other's thoughts. All we know is what is manifest. The only one who knows the thought is the spirit of the man who has the thought. And it's just an analogy, so here we are with God; we're like we are with each other, we can know what we see, we can see a certain amount of conduct, we can draw some

conclusions, but we don't know the deep things. We don't know the thought, what's going on in the mind and the heart of an individual. And the same is true of God. We can see what is manifest by what He has made, but we cannot know the deep things of God, any more than I can know what's in you. The spirit of a man knows what's in him and the Spirit of God knows the deep things of God.

So if we're going to know the saving truths, if we're going to know the deep truths of God, the spiritual truths, then we're going to have to have them revealed to us. And so verse 11 says, "The thoughts of God are not known to anybody except the Spirit of God." And then he goes on to say, "Now we" – this is the apostles, this is Paul and the other apostles who wrote the Scripture – "we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God that we might know the things freely given to us by God." And what is freely given to us by God? Forgiveness of sin, salvation, the hope of eternal life, all of the blessings of justification, sanctification, glorification – you can't know those by human reason. You can't find those by a test-tube experiment. You can't know that by rationalization. That is only known by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. You can't know about heaven except the Bible reveals it, right? You can't go there and not know about it. You can't know about salvation unless the Bible tells you. You can't know the means of forgiveness, the plan of God in redemption. And so Paul says we have received this information.

Paul, obviously – who wrote at least 13 epistles in the New Testament collectively himself – and the others who wrote Scripture are included in the "we." "We have received this from the Spirit so that all of us might know what has been freely given to us by God." And then he says, "We speak these things" – verse 13 – "not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit." Combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words – it's a great statement. He not only gave us the thoughts, the Holy Spirit not only gave us the thoughts, but He gave us – what – the words, and we wrote the words down. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," right? And 1 Peter says, "They were moved by the Holy Spirit and they wrote." That's the only way we can know about redemption. That's the only way we can know about salvation. That is the only way we can know the things that are below the surface, the deep things of God. You get down into the spiritual well, and that's only available to us because it was given by the Holy Spirit to apostles who wrote it down, and they took spiritual thoughts and put them in spiritual words.

Now, look at verse 14, and we could take this verse and drop it right before the eyes of anybody advocating natural theology. Listen to this: "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised, or understood, or evaluated, or examined." Here's the problem. A natural man that is unaided by supernatural revelation, unaided by Scripture, a natural man cannot know the things that only the Spirit of God knows. He can't know the deep things. To him they are foolishness; they are completely nonsense is what he's saying. He can't comprehend them. He can't understand them. He can't grasp them because they are spiritually appraised, they are not rationally appraised. They can't be examined by a rational mind. They can't be examined by any empirical study. They can't be

attained by any human intuition. It's not available.

So where does natural theology lead you? Here's the natural theologian's verse. Natural theology gets you nowhere; you can't accept the things of the Spirit of God, they are absolute folly, they're just nonsense. You can't understand them because they can only be appraised through the power and the revelation of the Holy Spirit – it's a very important verse. But for those of us who know the Scripture, who have been taught by the Holy Spirit through the Scripture – the end of verse 16 says – "we have the mind of Christ." And that really is critical, because that completes the trinity. The Father is God. The Spirit of God knows exactly the deep things of God, the things that are not visible on the surface by the senses, the five senses, and by our human reason. He, the Spirit, knows the full depth of the spiritual truths which constitute the mind of Christ. What is the mind of Christ? It's the way He thinks. We know how Christ thinks. You say, "How do we know how Christ thinks?" Because it's revealed here, right? We know how He thinks. We know God's thoughts on salvation. We know Christ's thoughts on salvation because the Holy Spirit has revealed them to us here in Scripture. Natural man, unaided by the mind of Christ revealed through the Spirit, gets nowhere. He ends up with no understanding. He ends up a fool, just like Romans 1 said, just like 1 Corinthians 1 said; it just keeps repeating the same thing over and over – whether you're in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 1, 1 Corinthians 2, you get the same effect. Man on his own ends up a fool and he ends up in judgment.

The only way you can know the mind of God with regard to the deep things, the things that relate to salvation, is through the revelation of Scripture. That's why it says "we live by every word that proceeds" – what – "out of the mouth of God," Matthew 4:4. That's why Jesus, in John 14:26, said to the disciples, "And the Holy Spirit is going to come upon you, and He's going to do this: He's going to teach you all things and He's going to bring all things to your remembrance. He's going to instruct you so you can write down the deep things that are not discernible to the human senses, or human intuition." You have to have revelation from the Spirit to know the deep things, the things that regard salvation which constitute the mind of Christ. We, the apostle Paul says, have that mind of Christ; we know exactly how Christ thinks, we know exactly how God thinks about these matters, because it's been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. You don't come to the true knowledge of God without the Bible. You don't come to the true knowledge of God without the gospel of Jesus Christ. Just the opposite is true, you end up a fool. You end up not understanding. You end up in ignorance. And the best that human wisdom can produce is sophisticated ignorance, sophisticated folly.

Now, let's go to the seventeenth chapter of Acts, because there's more to say, but I need to keep moving to get to the remaining texts in Acts 17. Now, I've had a couple of times the privilege of preaching in the Areopagus on Mars' hill in Athens. Any of you who have been there touring Athens perhaps have gone to this place; it's just below the Parthenon, which is, of course, the famous acropolis there where the false religions of the Greek Empire worshiped. And it's sort of between that high place and the low place, the Agora, the market, is this hill called Mars' hill of the Areopagus. It's where the philosophers always gathered, and in ancient times you didn't have television, you didn't

have radio, you didn't have print the way we know it today, so everything was verbal. And you went to school, as it were, by going up there, and the various elite, the literate, the philosophers, the orators were all up there, and they had their little groupies, and they were giving their philosophies. And so Paul went up there and did essentially what was a very normal thing to do in verse 22. They were into this. Verse 21 says they loved to get up there and hear new things.

So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you're very religious in all respects." Well, to some people today that might sound like enough, you know, just be very religious in all respects, and that's all that's really required. And if you're very religious in all respects, you know that God's going to count that as a fair enough deal and you're in, even if you don't know anything else. But he says to them, "You are very religious in all respects, for while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.'" How interesting. They've got lots of altars up there, and lots of gods that they worship, but they had this feeling that there might be one left out, and they don't want to offend him. They don't know who he is, but just to remove any unnecessary offense, they make a concession and put up an altar to the unknown god.

And he says to them, "This is a very religious thing to do, this is a noble thing to do. You don't know God, you haven't had His revelation, you don't have the Old Testament, you don't know about the God who is the creator, the God who is the sustainer of the universe, the God who is the God of Isaac and – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Israel, the living and true God, the only true God. You don't know about this God, but you're very religious and you've made a noble effort, folks, you really have. You've done as much as you can do without having a supernatural revelation and you've got this thing to the unknown God." He says to them in verse 23, "What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you." Let me tell you ignorant people who this really is. So here they were, having achieved their epitome of religion, and they were as ignorant as ignorant can be. So he says, "I want to tell you who this God is that you don't know."

They didn't know God, and God knew they didn't know God. Paul knew they didn't know God, and Paul wants them to know they don't know God. He says, "Let me introduce Him to you. He's the God who made the world and all things in it. Since He is the Lord or sovereign of heaven and earth, He doesn't dwell in temples made with hands, neither is He served by human hands." You don't walk up to Him with a plate full of stuff. You don't put a wreath around His neck. You don't make some kind of offering to Him. That's not the kind of God He is. He doesn't need anything. You don't have to feed Him. You don't have to put flowers on Him. He doesn't need anything. "He Himself gives to all life, and breath, and all things." Verse 26, "And He made from one every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation."

This is some God – this is the God of gods. This is the creator. This is the one who made everything in earth and everything in heaven. This is a Spirit being who can't be confined to any kind of temple,

and they had all these temples for all the deities of their contrivings. He is not a god who needs these trivial little things handed to Him. He Himself is the one who gives life and breath to all things. He created everything, and He sustains everything, and perpetuates everything, in the power that He has to give life. He is the God who determines what nations exist, and where they exist, and when they exist, the point of their origin, the point of their termination. He is in charge of history. This is the God you don't know. This is the God you are ignorant of. You can't worship some deity and say, "Oh well, that's the best shot they can make, they're really worshiping the true God." No, they're not. Paul says you're not. You're not worshiping Him. Now, he admits in verse 27, you may be seeking God, you may be sort of seeking, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him – that's what they're doing. They're groping with the idea or the thought – "If we grope enough and kind of meander enough in our musings and intuitions and religious experiences, we may find this God."

And then he adds in verse 27, "Though He's not far from each one of us." You know how close He is? Verse 28, "In Him we live and move and exist." You know how close God is to the pagan? He's so close that He's there. He's omnipresent. He's the source of life. They wouldn't take another breath if God weren't there. That's how close He is, and they still don't know Him, they're still groping, they're still searching, they're still in ignorance, they still can't find Him, though He's right there. They can't find Him. That's the point. One of their poets even recognizes, it says, in verse 28, "One of your own poets has said, 'We are also – we also are His offspring.'" Before evolution, nobody had this stupid thought that nobody times nothing equals everything. Before evolution, nobody could come up with something as ridiculous as the fact that everything came out of nothing. Everybody understood that there was a cause for every effect, there had to be a creator, there had to be a personal creator, there had to be a moral creator, because we're persons who understand moral law. There had to be, they knew that. And even a pagan poet said, "We know there's a creator, and we know we're his product, we know that and we're groping." And Paul says, "You know what? He's really very, very near, because you live and move in Him. He's very, very near, and you're groping, and as close as He is, and as much as you grope, you can't connect – can't connect. In fact, you know what you've done? You've done a terrible thing."

Verse 29, "Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man." You know what they do? This is what they do, this is exactly what Romans 1 says. They're groping, God is very near, their senses tell them there has to be a creator, their senses tell them, reason tells them He's intelligent, He's complex, He loves beauty, He has immense power, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Their senses tell them a lot about God, and He's very near, because their breath is the very essence of God's life power that they survive by. He's very near. They're groping, God is near, but you know what happens? Instead of coming to know the true God, they make an idol. That's exactly what they do, and it's exactly what it says in Romans 1. Because, as we saw in 1 Corinthians 2, by their natural theology they cannot understand God, they cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God, they cannot understand the way to God, they cannot understand the means of salvation or a relationship with God. And so what

they end up with is idols – idols. And so you haven't done any favor to the true God, you've just turned Him into a stone thing here called "the unknown god." That's not God. You ought not to think that God is a rock, or God is a piece of gold or a chunk of silver.

And you know what? Verse 30, "God has overlooked the times of ignorance" – you know, God has been patient with you up to now – "but God is now declaring to men all men everywhere should" – what – "repent – of what – your religion, repent of your religion, repent of your idolatry, repent of your false gods, repent of your false understanding of God, repent. He's not talking about repent of those categorical sins that we usually talk about when we think about repentance. He's saying you had better turn from – repent means to turn 180 degrees and go the opposite direction – you better turn away from this false religion, and you better head in the right direction. Why? Because, verse 31, "God has fixed a day." And what day is that? "The day in which He will judge" – who – "the world" – he's talking about judgment day. Judgment day is coming, and He's going to judge that world in righteousness, and He's going to judge that world through a Judge that He has already identified. John 5:22 to 27 says, "The Father commits all judgment to the Son – "the man whom He has appointed" – that's Jesus. God's going to judge the world, He's going to judge the world righteously, that is, on a righteous basis, a true, and just, and equitable, and righteous basis, by Christ. He has appointed Christ to be the judge, and He proved to all men that Christ is the judge by raising Him from the dead.

Oops – Paul has now gone into the gospel, and he must have explained more about it, because 32 says, "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead" – he must have explained the resurrection, and he must have explained the death of Christ. How can you explain a resurrection if you don't explain the death, right? You have to assume that he preached the cross, because he was determined to know nothing except the cross, and so he preached the cross, and he preached the resurrection, and he says, "Look, you have to repent of your false religion, no matter the fact that you are very religious in all respects," as verse 22 says. "No matter that you've come to the conclusion that you are the offspring of God; that's a nice sentiment. The problem is you don't know God by that. He's very near, you're groping, you can't connect; there's only one way to connect, and that's through the gospel of Jesus Christ, who died as a substitute for sin, paid the price for sin, and rose again. As the Father was affirming the satisfaction of that death, He raised Him from the dead and made Him Lord and Judge. And that's the path of salvation by faith in Christ, and He Himself will judge those who reject Him."

And what did they do? They began to – what – mock, sneer, right? Even when they heard the gospel, the preaching of the cross was to them – what – foolishness, 1 Corinthians 1. They can't – they can't understand it. They're lost without it, and when they hear it they mock. It's folly. But some of them said, "We'll hear you concerning this again. We want more. So Paul went out of their midst, but some men joined him and believed, among whom was Dionysius, the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them." There were some people who got the message, and they believed.

You see, the Lord is giving us a text here that says here's a man who went to the pagans and said, "You're very religious, and you know there's a God. You don't have the Bible, you don't have the gospel." He doesn't say, "Don't worry about it, guys." He says, "You better repent, you better repent, you better turn around and go the other direction, and the other direction is you better understand that the only way you will ever know God, and salvation, and forgiveness, is by understanding that God has appointed a judge. And that judge, who will judge all sinners, that judge is none other than the man, and the man is Christ Jesus, who died on the cross as a sacrifice for sin, and was raised by God from the dead to affirm that He had offered a sufficient and complete sacrifice. And in believing," as Romans 10 says, "that Jesus is Lord, confessing with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you'll be saved."

Natural man is ignorant. Natural man is idolatrous. That's where he is. That's what you see in Romans 1, he's there ignorant and idolatrous. You see him in 1 Corinthians 1, and what is he? He's foolish and he thinks he's wise, but his wisdom is folly with God. And here it is again, the wisest of the wise, the literate, the elite, the brain trust of Athens, the most religious, and most rational, and most erudite, groping around trying to find God, end up as idolaters, who better repent or be judged eternally by the one who offers them salvation through His death and resurrection. Natural man is ignorant. Natural man is idolatrous. Natural man cannot by virtue of any natural effort know God. But it's not just that he's left in limbo or some neutral position. Turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 10 – this is really shattering to this heresy, 1 Corinthians, chapter 10.

Let me give you a little scenario. You're a Christian, you're living in Corinth. You've been converted out of false religion, and you get married; of course, your wife is maybe a Christian, let's say. The two of you have come to Christ, you're in the church. But your mother-in-law is still worshiping Dionysius, or somebody, some false god. And your mother-in-law says, "You know, they're having a big banquet at the temple, and it's really important that you come because they're going to honor your father-in-law, and the whole family is going to be there, and it's really important for you to come." And so your wife, as well-intentioned as she is as a Christian, feels the pressure of mom. And you say, "Well, you know, I don't want to go, but also I don't want to make things worse with my mother-in-law. What am I going to do?" So you go drift over to the temple of Dionysius, and you go in there and it's an orgy to a false god. And it's a big eating thing, and you eat part of the food, and part of the food is offered as a sacrifice to the false god. And you feel really badly about that but, you know, after all, you know a lot of heat from your mother-in-law makes it difficult, because your wife feels that, and then she makes it difficult and, you know, if she's not happy, you're not happy, and so you do it. I mean you can imagine the pressure. That's just one possible scenario. There could be many more. And then you come to the Lord's table the next time, and you take the Lord's table; and you're sitting there, and you're taking the bread, and the cup, and honoring the Lord, and you've just come out of a place where you were at a feast that was honoring a false god.

Now, somebody might say, “Well, you know, those people don’t know any better. Boy, it’s a good attempt to find the true God. It’s a nice effort, and if they try to live a cut above the rest of the folks in their community, maybe God will accept that.” I want you to get the picture here. Verse 20 – this is exactly the scenario here in Corinth, verse 20. No, he says, an idol isn’t really anything, an idol itself, a stone idol isn’t anything, “But I say the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God.” You get that? That’s not a sacrifice to God. By the way, Gentiles – what are Gentiles? Anybody who is not Jewish – the nations, *ethnos*, the nations, everybody, the pagans, the heathens, the whole, the heathen – the whole world, all of them – and everything they sacrifice to their supposed stone, and silver, and gold idols, and wood idols, and whatever, it isn’t offered to God, it is offered to – they’re not engaging the true God, they’re engaging the forces of hell. They’re linked with Satan and demons. Don’t ever misunderstand that.

You say, “Well, those poor well-intentioned pagans, you know, they’re just kind of working their way toward God the best way they know how.” The fact of the matter is they’re working their way toward hell. They’re connecting with demonic forces that are impersonating the idols that don’t exist. There are no other gods than the true God, right? People believe there are, because demons impersonate the gods they worship, and do enough stuff to keep those people connected to those deities – false deities though they be. It’s not just neutral. It’s not just “too bad they’re ignorant.” It’s not just “too bad they’re sort of in limbo” – they’re not. Natural reason trying to find God ends up ignorant. Natural reason trying to find God ends up idolatrous. Natural reason trying to find God ends up demonic. Demons are behind all false religions. They are behind all philosophical and religious systems. They are behind – and that marvelous passage, 2 Corinthians 10:3 to 5 – they’re behind “every lofty thing lifted up against the knowledge of God.” Any anti-God idea is demonic – it’s demonic. Any – anything that’s untrue about God, anything that’s unbiblical, it’s demonic.

Satan is disguised, along with his demons, as angels or ministers of light. The god of the Buddhists is a demon. The god of the Muslims is a demon. The gods of the Hindus are demons. The god of the Mormons is a demon. The god of the Jehovah’s Witnesses is a demon – and every other religion that rejects Christ. It’s all demonic. This goes way back to Deuteronomy, the Pentateuch, the old law. Deuteronomy 32:17, Moses wrote, “Of those who sacrifice to demons who were not God.” You can also compare Psalm 106:37. They’re not going to God, they’re going to Satan and demons. You know, a good way to illustrate this is in 2 John there’s three verses, 9, 10 and 11. And in 2 John 9, 10, 11, John writes that if you deviate from what the Bible teaches about Christ, if you deviate from what the Bible teaches about Christ – we’re not saying that you deny Christ, that you deny that He lived, that you deny that He died, but if you deviate about what the Bible says concerning Christ – it says this, “Anybody who does that does not have God.” The point being, you can believe in the trinity, you can believe in the birth of Christ, you can believe in the life of Christ, you can believe in the death of Christ, but if you say He’s not God – that detail – if you say He didn’t live a sinless life, if you say, well, He didn’t really die a substitutionary death, if you say He didn’t literally raise from the dead – if you deny anything that is biblically revealed about Christ, you don’t have God. So listen to this, if

you're even wrong about Jesus you don't know God – to say nothing if you don't even know about Jesus. You're just engaging with demons.

People have asked me, "Is there a lot of satanic religion in our society?" Yes, everything but the truth. Everything but true Christianity is satanic to one degree or another, and in one manifestation or another. It's not that everybody, like some, worship Satan; there are some people who just worship Satan as such. But anybody who doesn't worship the true and living God through Jesus Christ in effect worships Satan. You don't want to do that, I don't think, because God gets very jealous; verse 22, "You want to provoke the Lord to jealousy." "You can't go to the table of demons and to the table of the Lord," it says in verse 21. Verse 22, "You don't want to provoke the Lord to jealousy." Deuteronomy 32:21, God said, "Israel made Me jealous with what is not God, and they provoked me to anger with their idols." God doesn't look at an idol and say, "Oh, that's a good try, I think that's a good enough try to get you in." God looks at an idol and says, "That makes Me jealous, that provokes Me to anger," and you don't want to provoke the Lord to anger. Why? Because you're not stronger than He is. I don't think you want to engage God, do you? The only way you would want to take God on is if you were stronger than He is, and you're not – pretty serious. So the best that man can do, his best religion, his best reason, he comes up with foolishness, ignorance, idolatry, and engages the forces of hell, and pulls them into his life.

One more passage of very great importance, Romans 3 – I don't have time to fully develop it, but I just need to make a few comments. Romans 3:10, and then I'm going to give you one more, and we'll be done. Romans 3, verse 10, here is the universal indictment of humanity. Romans 3:10, "There is none righteous" – how many – "not even one." Somebody, if that hadn't been there, would have said, "Except me," and so God said, "No, not you." "There's none righteous, no, not one, nobody. There's none who understands." We saw that in 1 Corinthians 2:14. "There is none who seeks for God." They don't go that way. You don't get there on the natural path. Instead, all have turned aside, they all go the wrong way, they all become useless. There's none who does good, there's not even one. They don't do good. It's not good. As John Gershner used to say, "It's bad good." It may be good on the human level, it's kindness or being nice to somebody or charitable. But it's bad good because the motive is not to glorify God, and anything less than that is a wrong motive. They don't do good. In fact, the truth of the matter is they're wretched on the inside. "Their throat's like an open grave; they open their mouth and out comes the stench of death. With their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps as under their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery in their paths. And the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." That is a description of humanity.

And what is this? Verse 19, the end of the verse, "It stops every mouth" – every mouth is closed. Don't open your mouth and try to defend yourself. Don't say, "But God, I tried; I'm a pretty good person, I'm certainly better than the people over here. And I'm a lot better than some folks I know, and you know them too." You stop your mouths, close your mouth, you're just accountable to God. All

that natural revelation does for you is make you accountable to God, and inexcusable, and it shuts your mouth. You have nothing to say, because in verse 20, by your deeds, your works of the law, meaning your good deeds, your religious deeds, nobody is going to be justified in God's sight. You can't get there from the standpoint of works. And listen to me – if you could be saved without the gospel, then salvation is by works. Nobody is going to get justified that way, and there's only one way to be justified, and he goes on to describe it, verse 22, "The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe." You have to come to Christ; you have to believe in Christ, the only way of salvation. Verse 23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift of His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" – the only way to be saved is by faith in Jesus Christ.

Okay, one more passage. Second Thessalonians 1:8, this is brief but very potent. Second Thessalonians 1:8 – actually, we probably should start in verse 7. Verse 7 talks about, middle of the verse, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels and flaming fire." This is the second coming, this is when – this is the day, you remember, the day of Acts 17, this is the day which He has appointed, in which the man Jesus is going to be the judge. When that day comes, "the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire," and He's coming in furious final judgment. Now, notice verse 8, very, very important. "He will deal out retribution." Retribution means judgment, it means payment, punishment; to whom? "To those who do not know God" – and who are they? "Those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" – that is designed in the Greek language to be an explanation of "those who do not know God." The word "and" would be better translated "even," because it's a further description of the same people. This flaming final judgment falls on those who do not know God, by virtue of the fact that they do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And "these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

If you don't believe the gospel, you don't know God. If you don't know God, you're going to be judged. You can read the book of Revelation and the unfolding of this judgment in great detail. You see, these heretical views of inclusivism and wider mercy, or as one writer called it, "later light," or natural theology – "later light" referring to what Peter Kreeft said, "When you die and go to heaven, what you don't know will get straightened out up there" – all of that is frightening in its implications. It is a damning and deadly heresy, because we must reach people with the gospel so they can hear and be saved. God Himself – Augustus Strong said this in his theology, not in these words, many, many years ago – God Himself is the only source of knowledge with regard to His own being and a relationship with Him. And God, as the only source, must disclose it to us, and He has, by the Holy Spirit who knows the deep things of God, revealing it to the writers who wrote it down, and thus we have the mind of God and the mind of Christ.

Natural theology reduces you to an ignorant idol worshiper, engaged with demons and headed for divine judgment. It is sufficient to damn, that natural revelation, that natural theology, but not to save.

It makes man without excuse, but not without condemnation. Our command and duty as responsible Christians, then, is still in place. “Go into all the world and” – do what – “preach the gospel to every creature.” And that is a good place to close, with the words of Jesus at the end of Mark’s gospel, 15 and 16 of the 16th chapter: “Go into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature. He who has believed and been baptized shall be saved. He who has disbelieved shall be condemned.” That is our commission; it stands, and we’re responsible to do that, so that people can hear the saving truth.

Father, thank You again for the clarity with which the Word speaks to these things. There are many other passages that we can address, many others that weigh in on this important issue, but this is sufficient for us to know that You have left no doubt and no question to any legitimate mind concerning this matter. The reason we are sent to the ends of the earth with the gospel, the reason we go with such passion, conviction, and sacrifice is because it is necessary that they hear to be saved. And would You use us, Lord, to do that? Would You make us sensitive and eager to present the gospel, faithfully, at all times, to all people? This is our calling, our commission, our command. This is our duty. This is our great privilege. And would you exalt the truth and put down all the lies and confusion? Protect Your people that they might know Your will, which is revealed in Your Word. Thank You for it in Christ’s name. Amen.

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