

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

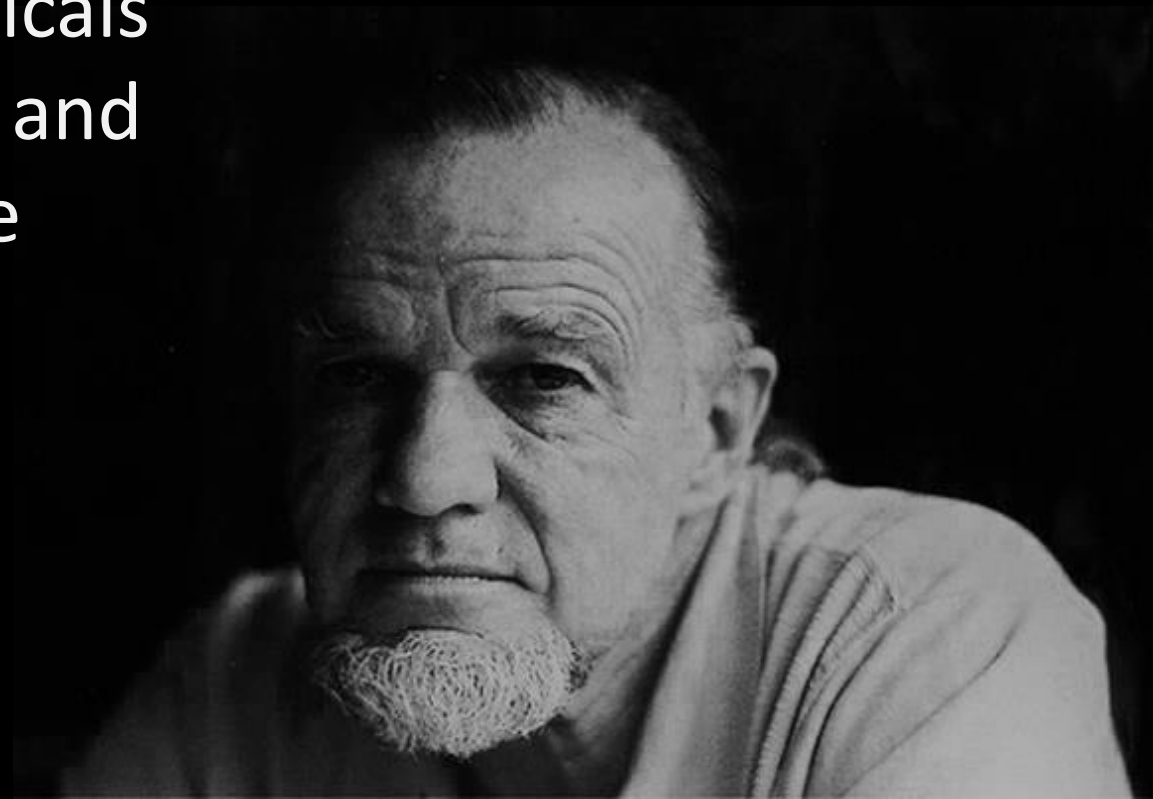
LESSON 16:

The Word of the Cross

MEN OF THE WORD

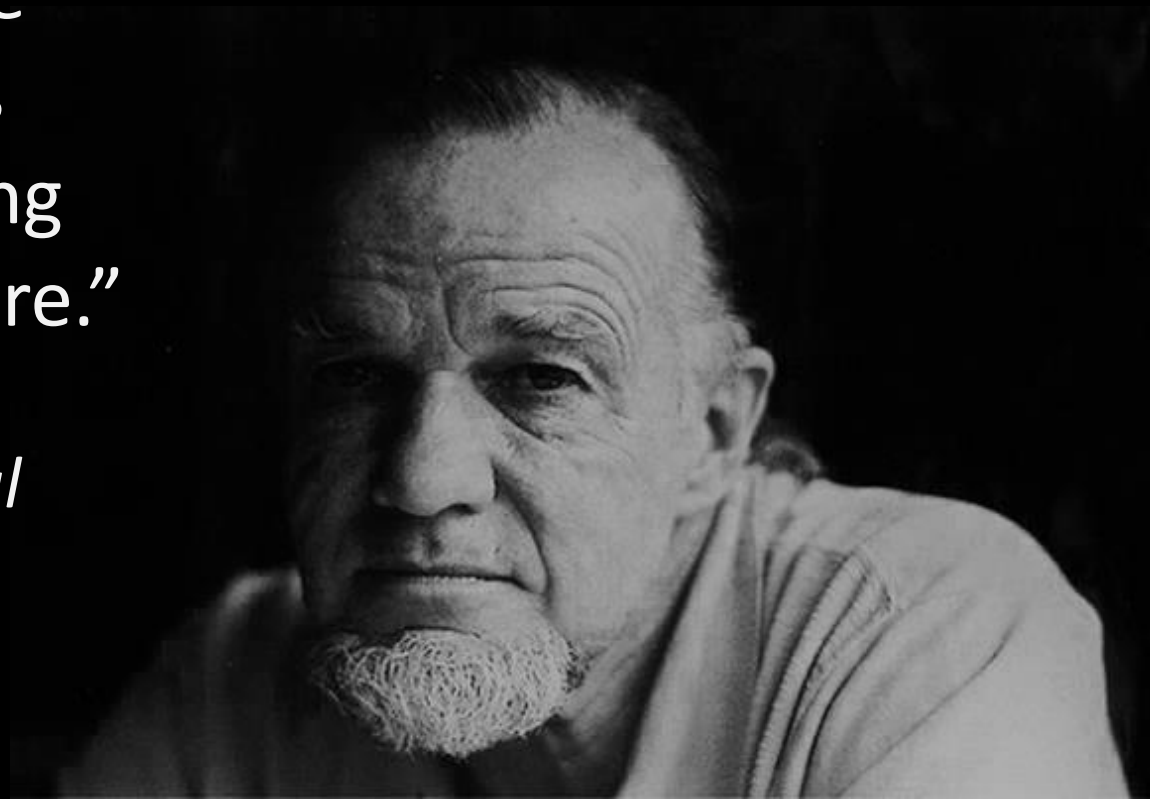
March 16, 2022

“Here is the great evangelical disaster—the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this—namely *accommodation*. The evangelical church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age. First, there has been accommodation on Scripture, so that many who call themselves evangelicals hold a weakened view of the Bible and no longer affirm the truth of all the Bible teaches—truth not only in religious matters but in the areas of science and history and morality



“This accommodation has been costly, first in destroying the power of the Scriptures to confront the spirit of our age; second, in allowing the further slide of our culture. Thus we must say with tears that it is the *evangelical accommodation* to the world spirit around us, to the wisdom of this age, which removes the evangelical church from standing against the breakdown of our culture.”

—Francis Shaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 37–38



- The desire for *validation* is one of the strongest motivating forces known to man.
- Christians are not immune, and many times capitulate to this force through *intellectual accommodation*.
- The tendency is to subject the Christian worldview to the demands of the unbeliever—out of fear of being labelled a “fundamentalist” or “fanatic.”
- For many Christians, “*Thou shall not offend*” becomes the eleventh great commandment.

1 Corinthians 1:18–31

I. The Bankruptcy of Human Opinion (1:18–25)

- **1:18** – “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”
- “Word of the cross” is broad in that it includes the totality of apostolic teaching—“the whole counsel of God.”
- “Word of the cross” is explicit in that it emphasizes the centrality of Christ’s atonement in this teaching.
- Paul divides all humanity into two groups based on the *response* to this “word.”

- “foolishness” –
μωρία (*mōria*)
- “to those who are
perishing”
- Crucifixion was
man’s means for
ridiculing and
exterminating
despised criminals.



- “power of God” –
δύναμις θεοῦ
(*dunamis Theou*)
- “to those who are
being saved”
- Crucifixion was
God’s means of
bringing forgiveness
to the sinner.

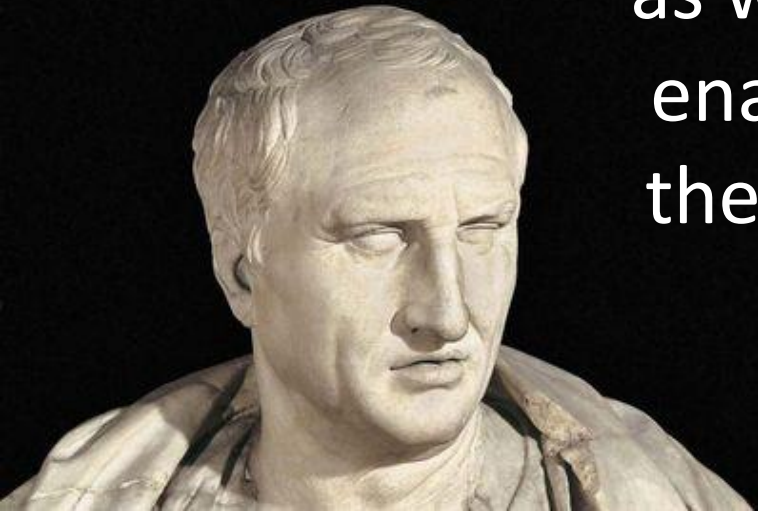
“Crucifixion was never a private event. It was always raw, and searingly public, because its purpose was to terrify the masses into submission to the authorities. Crosses often lined the main roads into cities, holding the broken writhing bodies of the condemned, or displaying the rotting corpses of the dead. The Romans even scheduled public crucifixions to coincide with religious festivals, insuring the maximum number of people present to witness the horror. Murderers, robbers, traitors, and slaves were crucified, brutally, by the thousands all over the empire and always deliberately



“Shredded flesh against unforgiving wood, iron stakes pounded through bone and wracked nerves, joints wrenched out of socket by the sheer dead weight of the body, public humiliation before the eyes of family, friends, and the world—that was death on the cross, ‘the infamous stake’ as the Romans called it, ‘the barren wood,’ *the maxima mala crux*. Or as the Greeks spat it out, the *stauros*. No wonder no one talked about it. No wonder parents hid their children’s eyes from it. The *stauros* was a loathsome thing, and the one who died on it was loathsome too, a vile criminal whose only use was to hang there as a putrid, decaying warning to anyone else who might follow his example. That is how Jesus died.” —Greg Gilbert, “God’s Self-Substitution for Sinners,” 71–72

“Wretched is the loss of one’s good name in the public courts, wretched, too, a monetary fine exacted from one’s property, and wretched is exile, but, still, in each calamity there is retained some trace of liberty. Even if death is set before us, we may die in freedom. But the executioner, the veiling of heads, and the very word “cross,” let them all be far removed from not only the bodies of Roman citizens but even from their thoughts, their eyes, and their ears. The results and suffering from these doings as well as the situation, even anticipation, of their enablement, and, in the end, the mere mention of them are unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man.”

—Cicero (106–43 BC)



“Of all religions, a strong case can be made against Christianity as the worst, because it rests on the allied doctrines of original sin and vicarious atonement, which are intellectually contemptible and morally outrageous.”

—A. J. Ayer, *The Guardian*, August 30, 1979

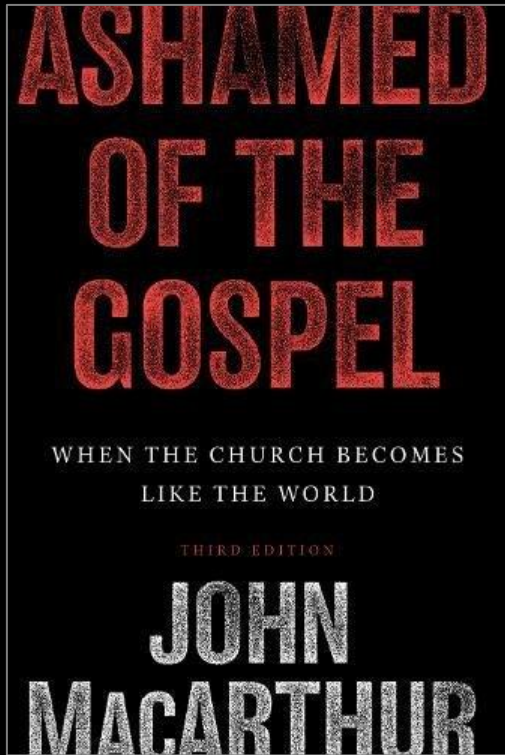
- **1:20a** – “Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?”
- Three rhetorical questions, assuming the answer, “Nowhere!”
- Three titles of human *intelligentsia*:
 - 1) “the wise man” (σοφός, *sophos*) – “one having intelligence and education above the average”;
 - 2) “the scribe” (γραμματεύς, *grammateus*) – “the specialist in the law of Moses”; and
 - 3) “the debater (συζητητής, *syzētētēs*) of this age” – “the contemporary philosopher.”

- **1:20b** – “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”
- A fourth rhetorical question, assuming the answer: “Indeed He has!”
- The silencing of human wisdom is not achieved as a result of an intellectual competition but by a declaration of God—made in the form of a cross!
- The scandalous death of Christ proves efficacious not only for the salvation of the elect (v. 18), but for the condemnation of the natural human intellect (v. 20).

- **1:22–24** – “For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

- 1) EVIDENTIALISTS: The Jews rejected the word of God and demanded *miracles* (“power”) before they would believe.
- 2) RATIONALISTS: The Gentiles rejected the word of God and demanded *syncretism* (“wisdom”) before they would believe.
- 3) REVELATIONISTS: The apostles rejected the demands of men and simply preached the offensive *word* about Christ.

- **1:25** – “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”
- Verdict: the natural intellect and its demands are bankrupt!
- What man judges as “foolishness” and “weakness”—the cross—turns out to be the “wisest” and “strongest.”
- What is offensive and scandalous is what is *true*.
- There can be no *true* understanding of God, self, or this world apart from embracing the centrality of the cross of Christ.



As in the church at Corinth, many today have “bowed at the shrine of academia, attempting to assimilate secular theology, philosophy, politics, psychology, moral relativism, evolutionary theory, and every other academic fad. Finding those things incompatible with the Bible and the simplicity of the gospel, Christians have too often been willing to twist and shape divine truth to try to make it fit. Multitudes have thus been drawn away from singular devotion to biblical doctrine to embrace human wisdom.”

—John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 110



Timothy Keller ✓

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If you tell people they are wrong because the Bible says so--and they don't believe the Bible--you won't persuade them. If you tell people they are wrong based on their own premises--because some of their beliefs contradict their others--they are likely to listen to you more.

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II. The Triumph of Divine Wisdom (1:26–31)

- **1:26** – “For consider **your calling**, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.”
- Paul now addresses believers (“brethren”) and exhorts them to direct their attention to their “calling.”
- The term refers to their *selection by God* (1:2, 24; Rom 11:24; Eph 4:1); otherwise, no one would believe this message.
- This selection has taken place out of the pool of *foolishness, powerlessness, and insignificance*.

- **1:27–28a** – “but God has **chosen** the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has **chosen** the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has **chosen** the things that are not.”
- ἐκλέγομαι (*eklegomai*) – “I pick out for myself, I choose.”
- No one who believes the word of the cross can attribute their belief to their own intelligence.
- God’s approach is to *choose* in such a way that *belief* can never be attributed to education, authority, status, or privilege.

- **1:28b–29** – “so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.”
- Two purpose statements describe God’s strategy of the cross, one developing out of the other:
 - 1) to “nullify” (invalidate) the “things that are” (human pride);
 - 2) to remove any potential for taking pride in self.
- **1:30–31** – “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, ‘LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.’”

How then shall we respond?

1. Marvel at the grace of God manifest in your salvation.

- **1:26** – “Consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.”
- You would *not* have believed the message. You did because God chose to manifest His grace in your unworthiness.
- Be humbled.





“I know nothing, nothing again, that is more *humbling* for us than this doctrine of election. I have sometimes fallen prostrate before it, when endeavoring to understand it. I have stretched my wings, and, eagle-like, I have soared towards the sun. Steady has been my eye, and true my wing, for a time; but, when I came near it, and the one thought possessed me,—‘God hath from the beginning chosen you unto salvation,’ I was lost in its luster, I was staggered with the mighty thought; and from the dizzy elevation down came my soul, prostrate and broken, saying, ‘Lord, I am nothing, I am less than nothing. Why me? Why me?’”

—Spurgeon, “Election,” preached Sunday, Sept 2, 1855

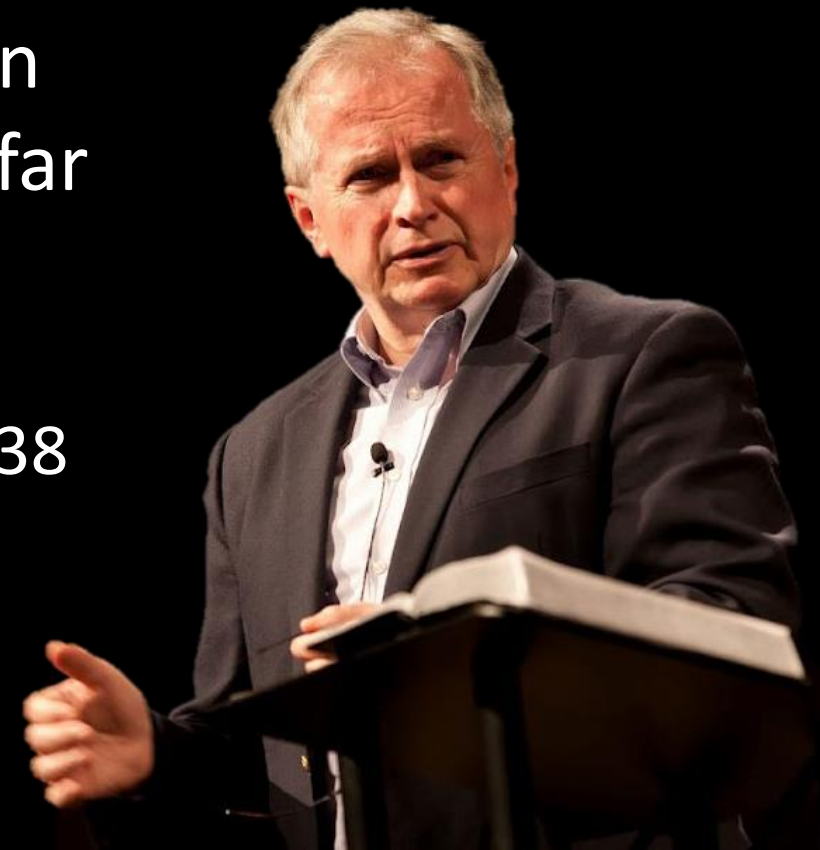
2. Reclaim the cross of Christ as the center of your worldview.



- **1:23–24** – “but we preach Christ crucified . . . the power of God and the wisdom of God.”
- **2:2** – “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”
- This world and our own lives only make sense and have meaning in light of the atonement of Jesus Christ.

“I fear that the cross, without ever being disowned, is constantly in danger of being dismissed from the central place it must enjoy, by relatively peripheral insights that take on far too much weight. Whenever the periphery is in danger of displacing the center, we are not far removed from idolatry.”

—D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 38

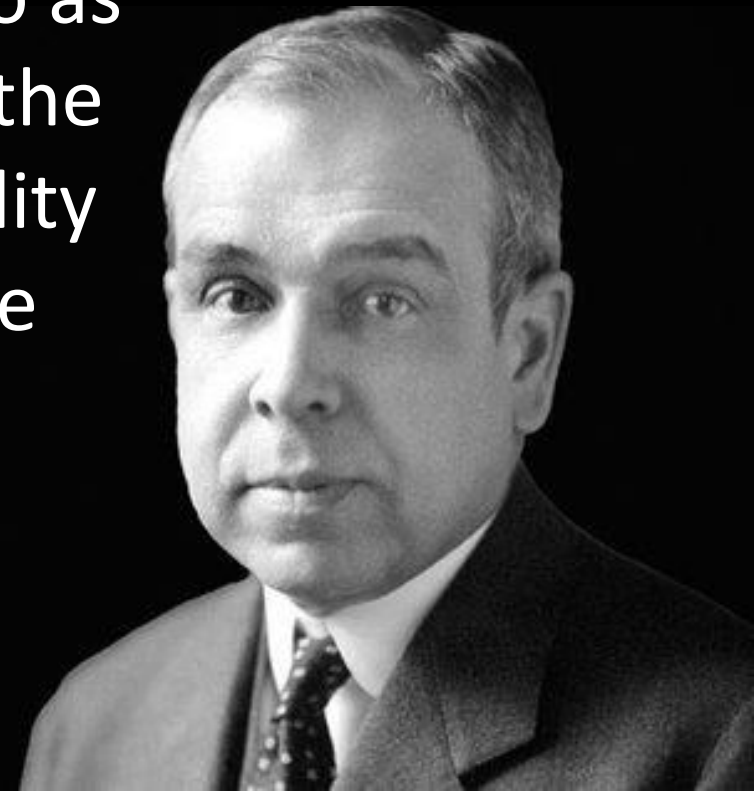


3. Stop striving for the validation of the world.

- **1:21** – “. . . God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”
- The desire for *validation* is indeed a powerful motivating force. But look for that validation for your beliefs and witness to the gospel in *God* alone.
- What God looks on with disdain, we cannot look on with respect.

“There are those who are concerned with the question of their standing before men but never with the question of their standing before God. There are those who are interested in what “people say” but not in the question of what God says. Such men, however, are not those who move the world. They are apt to go with the current. They are apt to do as others do. They are not the heroes who change the destinies of the race. The beginning of true nobility comes when a man ceases to be interested in the judgment of men and becomes interested in the judgment of God.”

—J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Faith?*, 163



“God was so precious to my soul that the world with all its enjoyments appeared vile. I had no more value for the favor of men than for pebbles.”

—*David Brainerd*

(18th cent. missionary to Native Americans)

4. Don't be ashamed to associate with the church.

- A lot of this happened during the Covid era. The world harnessed the power of shaming and convinced many to abandon association with the church.
- **Romans 1:16** – “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”
- Courage in the gospel manifests itself in courage to associate with those the gospel saves—weak and unseemly as they are.

“The outward appearance and condition of the saints in those days being very mean and contemptible—their leaders being accounted as the filth of this world and as the offscouring of all things—the inviting [of] others into fellowship with them and a participation of the precious things which they did enjoy, seem to be exposed to many contrary reasonings and objections: ‘What benefit is there in *communion* with them? Is it anything else but to the sharers in troubles, reproaches, scorns, and all manner of evils?’ . . .



“To prevent or remove these and the like exceptions, the apostle gives them to whom he wrote to know . . . that notwithstanding all the disadvantages their fellowship lay under, unto a carnal view, yet in truth it was, and would be found to be . . . very honorable, glorious, and desirable. For ‘truly,’ says he, ‘our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.’”

—John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, 89–90



MEN — OF THE — WORD

Wednesdays 7:00-9:00 PM

www.gracechurch.org/motw