

JJ<sup>1</sup>

Throughout time, every person in every generation has struggled with it to one degree or another. It's the problem that causes every previous generation to look at the one following them and say, "Young people just don't have any respect anymore." And to a point, it's true. But it's not any more true than generations before us. It's the attitude that particularly afflicts the hearts and minds of those in their teens through mid-twenties (though it can often last much longer than that). It's the "I've already got it all figured out and don't need your help, advice, or wisdom, thank you very much" attitude.

Now I'm not here to pick on you youngsters, though there's a lesson to be learned for you in that. I'm also not here to make you more venerable members get a big head and look down on the next generation. I talk about this because I see this behavior is such a terribly perfect reflection of how people, you and me included, often view and treat God.

So often people create a caricature of God that he's just some old dolt with long white hair and a long white beard sitting up in the clouds, and fairly uninterested in the affairs and struggles of our lives. So often people try to make God into what they want him to be, or what they want to get out of him. And when those

desires aren't met, anger erupts and God is forgotten. Suddenly, God is **A WEAK & FOOLISH GOD.**

The Apostle Paul addresses this problem in his first letter to the Corinthians: "Yes, Jews ask for signs, Greeks desire wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified—which is offensive to Jews and foolishness to Greeks..."

The cross of Christ was offensive to Jews who wanted powerful signs from the Messiah like their ancestors saw at Mt. Sinai. They wanted to be overwhelmed into belief, rather than turn to the Lord in repentance. Jesus was the pinnacle of weakness to them, not only because he refused to perform spectacular miracles at their demand, but he wasn't even able to save himself from death on a cross. And that was the most offensive thing of all. The Messiah was supposed to be powerful and glorious, not weak and disgraced. The Messiah was supposed to remain forever, not die. The Messiah was supposed to enjoy God's highest favor, but Jesus was cursed by being hung on the tree of the cross! So many Jews rejected Jesus then, and it is for this reason that so many still reject him today.

The cross of Christ was also offensive and foolish to the Greeks/Gentiles. They demanded that God's plan to save the world be reasonable, logical, and

<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

rational. They wanted God's wisdom to be proven on a fact sheet they could test themselves. But reason asks: How could someone who died the worst punishment reserved for the worst of criminals be a Savior? How could someone who died, give anyone life? How could someone who died be God himself? How could God crucify his own innocent Son instead of those who were actually guilty? How could this same God credit this Savior's perfect life and innocent death to other people? How could the bad things I've done need such a radical solution? How can my own good deeds be totally irrelevant to my status before God and eternal life? Christ and his cross was utter foolishness to so many Gentile people at Paul's time, just as it is today because it doesn't make sense.

But before you go looking down on so many back then and so many today, realize that you too are a part of this same generation of fallen mankind. Realize that you too can live as though the message of the cross, the Gospel, is offensive foolishness rather than the very power of God to save.

Maybe you consider yourself an intellectual. Maybe you put man's knowledge and achievements up on a high pedestal. Maybe you do the same

with yourself. Proud that you're not like the average American. You're smarter. But then maybe you're a little too smart for your own good. Maybe God's Word and wisdom at times is just a little too quaint for you, a little boring. Maybe you think to rely solely on the Word doesn't make sense, and that it needs to be spiced up or enhanced with method or entertainment. Maybe you feel that the really wise person, the real thinker, doesn't just take God at his Word, but

analyzes it to make their own truth out of it. Maybe you're fascinated with these "big" thinkers who have all these new insights into God's Word and yet are leaving behind the attitude of the Apostle Paul who later in this same letter said, "I had no intention of knowing anything among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).



But I think most of you might struggle more with the thinking and desires that plagued and plagues so many Jews, just like I do. Maybe you look for signs and proof of God's grace and favor in your life in material possessions, wealth, success or good health. But what good is that when your house burns to the ground, you lose your job, your savings vanish or you get sick? Does that all of the sudden mean that God's love and grace have left you

God's love and grace have left you behind?

I'm sure you've wondered, thought, even said out loud, something like, "If I could just see...then I'd..." "If I could just see Jesus, that would make believing a whole lot easier. If I could just see a miracle like Jesus performed so long ago, it would be so much easier for me to prove to my friend that God is real!" Or maybe you're looking for a sign in every little thing to govern your life or to tell you what to do. Can God do this? Yes. Does he promise to do this? No.

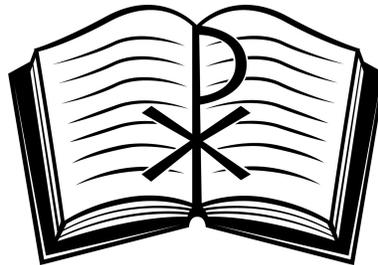
Do you think, perhaps, that your desire for a sign from God to let you know what to do is more your desire to listen to God, or is it more laziness and unwillingness to simply use your God-given gifts of reason and wisdom to look at what God has already said to you in his Word? I'd argue it's more often the latter—at least it is for me. Take, for example, when I deliberate a call. There are times when I just want some big neon sign in the sky from God that makes my decision for me. Why is that? Because that's the easy way. Yet every time I'm driven back to prayer and the study of God's Word and using the gifts God has given me to deliberate those calls and to come to a decision myself.

Maybe a certain song came on the radio at a particular moment. Maybe God did

keep you from saying something or sending a text. Is that a sign, or is that God simply gave you the chance to stop, think, and ponder his Word so that you could see clearly and act according to his will?

Friends, don't wait for a sign God has never promised to give. Otherwise you'll either try to make something out of nothing, or be left as disappointed as so many in this world, both Jew and Gentile alike. Either way, it betrays your lack of trust in God and in his revealed Word and will. Don't let God become **A WEAK**

**& FOOLISH GOD** in your hearts! You've been set apart from this way of thinking. You've been chosen by God to behold the real power and wisdom of God in Christ crucified!!!



"... to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. We preach Christ crucified, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

God's apparent impotence in Christ on the cross is stronger than all that man has to offer. Even stronger than what you might consider to be the greatest demonstration of man's power—the harnessing of the atom. If you took all the atomic weapons that exist or ever have existed, they don't even scratch the

surface of the power of God suffering on a cross. Why? Because, while man's greatest power is made to destroy life, God's greatest "weakness" saves the whole world from sin and damnation!

The Gospel of Christ crucified is utter foolishness to sinful mankind, yet God uses it to reveal the greatest truth—Jesus is Savior! God is **A WEAK & FOOLISH GOD** from a human point of view. But his apparent weakness is stronger than anything we can muster. His apparent foolishness is wiser than anything we can ponder. God isn't some old dolt with long white hair and a long white beard sitting up in the clouds, and fairly uninterested in the affairs and struggles of our lives. He came down to us and was conceived in the womb of a virgin named Mary. He was a child who grew into a young man who looked just like any of his other fellow Jews. He lived with us. He walked with us. He talked with us. He ate with us. He cried with us. Then, he died *for* us, and rose again *for* us. That doesn't sound like a disinterested God to me. And I know it doesn't to you.

If anyone is weak and foolish, it's you, it's me, for every time we've doubted God's strength and wisdom. And yet we're still the ones for whom Christ was crucified. We're still the ones God continues to love and forgive day in and

day out. We're still the ones God longs to commune with both in the supper about to be offered, and in the most excellent way by his side in heaven. How wonderful, beautiful, powerful, and wise, that the grace of God is found only in the foolishness of a weak man crucified on a cross! Amen.

SDG<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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