

My Attitude Toward the Cross of Christ

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 1:17-33

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First Corinthians chapter one verse 22 answers a question. First Corinthians 1:22 answers a question. What do people want from preachers? What do people want from preachers and from those who say that they speak for God? Or those who represent God? What do they want from them?

Well, it says here the Jews require a sign. Now, who are the Jews? Well, the Jews represent the religious population, the religious population in any day. They were the religious people back when Paul was writing this Word. They were the traditionalists. They were the temple dwellers. They were the folks who went to church. They were the folks who said they believe in God.

What do they want? What do they require? They require a sign. Show us a sign. Let us see signs and wonders. Let us see miracles. Let us see healings. Let us see impressive movements and let us see crowds. Prove to us that God is among you. Prove to us by signs and wonders that God is with you. Prove to us that you speak for God.

That's what they said at the cross to our Lord. They said, "If you be the Christ prove it. Come down and we will believe."

They said to the disciples and to our Lord, "What signs showeth thou? Show us a sign that we may believe."

Our Lord said, "This evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign. No sign shall be given."

The rich man in hell said to Abraham, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus back to the earth. If you will send a man back to the earth who has been dead and risen from the dead my brothers will believe. All they want is a sign. They just want some proof."

That is what it says here. What do people want from preachers and those who say they speak for God? They want proof. They want signs. They want miracles. That accounts for the success of preachers who will give them what they want. That accounts for the following. Though they are saying nothing and everybody knows they are saying nothing, but they are at least doing something. And that impresses folks. Isn't that right? Sure, it impresses them.

A football stadium filled with people, surging masses going down to an altar, that is impressive. That is a sign.

Somebody breaks a wheelchair or breaks a crutch or throws a cane way or some fellow comes and down says he can't hear and he goes out saying I can hear. That's impressive. People want to see something. Show us a sign. Prove that God is with you.

The Jews, the religious traditionalists, the temple dwellers, they want to see something. They want to see something. They haven't changed. They said to our Lord, "Show us a sign."

He said, "This evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign and no sign will given, but one: the Word of God."

What do people want? Well the question is posed and answered, further, verse 22. And the Greeks what do they want? What do they require? What are they seeking for? They seek after wisdom. The Greeks seek after wisdom. Not the wisdom of God, mind you. There are very few people who are interested in the wisdom of God which is Christ. There are very few people interested in the wisdom of God. But the wisdom that they are seeking is the wisdom of men.

You see Corinth, this city here, where these people lived. Where these believers lived to whom Paul was writing, Corinth was a center of learning. It was a center of philosophy and human wisdom. And the Greeks were in love with...in love with oratory. They were in love with intellectualism. They were in love with human wisdom. And that is what they wanted. They wanted Paul and these other preachers to show them some human wisdom. They wanted clever preachers, not Christ preachers, Paul. They want clever preachers. That is what our generation wants. They don't want Christ preachers. They want clever preachers. They want the ear tickled, not the heart pricked. I am not interested in your sending me out of here weeping. I want you to send me out of here feeling good. I want my ear tickled. I don't want this heart broken.

They want to hear of signs, not sins. They want one to deal with human rights, not the crown rights of King Jesus. I would rather you wouldn't deal with that. Deal with our human rights. We have a right. Speak of reformation, not regeneration.

I'll tell you. Like Paul of old I honestly, sincerely weep for my generation. I weep for them. This is my generation right here. The religious require a sign, proof, miracles, crowds, movements, wonders. That's what they require. They want to see something, feel something, excitement, emotionalism. And the rest of them seek after wisdom. They want clever preachers, not Christ preachers.

I had a man say to me the other night after I preached up in the mountains of Kentucky in Turkey Creek, Kentucky; an older gentleman, I have known him for 30 some odd years, actually 35 years, stayed in his home one time when I preached up in Chattaroy, West

Virginia. And he came out of the meeting on Thursday night and shook my hand he said this. “Preachers like you, preachers like you, preachers of Christ, preachers of the gospel are a vanishing breed. And unless God is pleased to raise up some young men who are bold and willing to preach Jesus Christ, the next generation is in serious trouble as far as hearing from God.”

Well, God is raising up some here who are preaching Christ and I believe in some other places. There are men who preach Christ. But I weep for my generation. Paul describes his generation and ours, too, in Romans 10. You want to look at it? I weep for my generation. The religion of this day, the popular, accepted religion of this day and the religion of this town—and I am not a fanatic, I am not an alarmist. I don’t even claim to read the signs of the time, but I know what I am hearing. And I know what I am reading. And the religion of this day and of this town is as far from almighty God and the holiness of God and the glory of God and the redemption of God in Christ Jesus as it has ever been in the history of this world. I believe that, Ronnie. It is sickening, utterly, absolutely, sickening.

People are not preaching the Word of God. They are declaring what they think and what they believe and how it ought to be from man’s standpoint...No, from women’s standpoint. They have taken over. You know it and I know it. They have taken over the churches. God forbids a woman to preach or teach or usurp authority in the Church of God. And we are pushing them to the forefront because they are the ones that are given to this emotionalism, entertainment and folly. And men have no backbone. That is our generation. The preachers have no backbone. They are cowards. We are gone unless somebody dares to stand up and speak. I am telling you the truth.

In Romans 10, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.” That’s my prayer for my generation. Saved, not religious. Saved. Not traditionalist. Saved.

“I know my Bible.”

I know you do, but you don’t know God’s Bible.

“Well, I know who... I know what I believe.”

But you don’t know whom. That’s the problem.

“I bear them record. They have a zeal of God.”

You say, “Preacher, this generation has more zeal for God than any generation I have lived in.”

You are right. They have. No question about it. Their God, not this God. They have a zeal of God, but it is not according to knowledge. It is not according to knowledge. They

are ignorant of God's righteousness, God's righteousness. I'll harp on it until somebody picks up the tune, God's righteousness. They are ignorant of it.

And they are going about feeding the hungry, healing the sick, building their schools, keeping their kids off the streets, keeping them out of drugs and dope, keeping the girls straightened out. Fighting abortion. They are going about to establish their own righteousness, their own holiness, their own goodness before God. And they will not submit, will not submit, they will not submit. That is the oath of submission.

The Bible says over in John one, "As many as received him." Do you know what that word is? Submit to him. "To them gave he the right to become sons of God."

They will not submit unto the righteousness of God for Christ is the goal, the consummation, the end of the law for righteousness. You don't have any. It is in him.

I weep for my generation. I weep for them. I don't weep for the preachers. I weep for the people. The preachers are deliberate liars. The problem is not in the pew, it is in the pulpit. They are professional con artists. They have no love and regard for God almighty.

In verse 17 of 1 Corinthians one listen to it. Paul said, "God didn't send me to baptize, to organize, to promote, to charm men, to build religious empires. God sent me to preach the gospel. And that not with wisdom of words and eloquence and charming charismatic excitement, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For," now watch this. Now listen to me. There are just two attitudes. There are just two attitudes that a person can take toward the cross of Christ.

"God sent me not to baptize, but to preach the cross."

Verse 18. "For the preaching of the cross," now listen to me. When Paul says "the preaching of the cross," he is not referring to the cross on which Christ died. Do you understand that? That is not what he is talking about. The preaching of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness. The preaching of the cross is to them who are saved the power of God. God sent me to preach the cross. He is not talking about that block of wood on which our Lord died. We need to take all the signs and the symbols like this out of religion, totally away so people won't have their mind on a thing, but on a person.

The most ridiculous thing in the world. Even our kids out in the yard playing vampire, they will get them two sticks of wood and go at the vampire like this, you know, a cross.

Paganism.

But there are preachers wear them on their coats, on their robes and the churches have them on their steeples to ward off the evil. We have them as symbols of our God, a hated, despised, ignominious cross is not a symbol of my God. A throne is the symbol of my God. When Isaiah saw the Lord he didn't see him on a cross, he saw him on a throne. Do you understand that?

And when we talk about the cross we are not talking about that block of wood, that tree on which he died. We are talking about—listen—when he talks about the cross of Christ and the preaching of the cross, he is talking about all that is included and accomplished in his death, in his eternal covenant, in his divine purpose to redeem, in his high priestly work, in his substitution, in his sacrifice, in his sin offering, his life, death and resurrection to honor God's law and satisfy God's justice. The cross of Christ is all that is required to enable God to be just and justify. That's the preaching of the cross.

Do you see that, Dan? And that's so. That's the preaching of the cross. The cross, when he says here, "For the preaching of the cross is to them who perish cross. The preaching of the cross," verse 18, "is to them which are saved is the power of God." It is the preaching of all that Christ is and all that Christ has done and all that Christ does and all that Christ will do in the redemption of his people toward the holy law and justice of God, substitution, satisfaction, sin offering, sacrifice. That's the cross. The cross is just the acme, the paramount, the...when it all was culminated, when Christ lifted and died. But everything that led up to the cross is included in the cross. And everything, Charlie, that happens after the cross is included in the cross and was accomplished at the cross. Understand that? That's the preaching of the cross.

Now there's two attitudes you can take toward that gospel message, two attitudes. Number one, foolishness, sheer nonsense. That is what it says here.

Verse 18, "The preaching of the cross is to them that are perishing, foolishness, sheer nonsense."

Now I can tell you why. I can tell you exactly why. I don't know whether anybody here is of that opinion, but I know that that opinion does reign, foolishness. And I can tell you why. I can tell you exactly why the preaching of the cross, God's election, God in his holiness looking with favor upon man in his sinfulness because of a surety. God in his righteousness forgiving and pardoning a sinner in his rebellion through a ransom paid by a redeemer and men say it is foolishness.

I tell you why. Do you know why they say it is foolishness? I'll tell you three reasons. Number one, it deals with a subject in which they have no interest, salvation from sin.

Do you know why the people you work with, the people you live with, the people in your family...at your family reunions, do you know why they don't want to talk about Christ, about his cross, about his death? Because that deals with a subject in which they have no interest. They are not interested in the curse of the law. They are not interested in the wrath of God being appeased. They are not interested in salvation from sin because they that be whole need not a physician. That's what.

I am not too interested in a lecture this afternoon on heart trouble and bypass surgery. I am not interested. Do you know why? I got no trouble. I am not a candidate for bypass surgery.

“Oh,” but you say, “You may be.”

That has no bearing on it. It is what I am right now. And do you know who is not interested in the cross? They have no trouble and no sin.

Our Lord said, “I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners.” It is just that simple. Only a sinner needs a Savior. Only a sick man needs a physician. Only a lost man needs a redeemer. Only a lost man needs a cross. So they are not interested. It is foolishness.

Here is the second reason. See if this is not true. It is foolishness to them because it deals with a subject in which they have no interest. Secondly, the cross of Christ, substitution, does not recognize in any shape, form or fashion human merit. It doesn't recognize it. It does not recognize human works. It does not recognize human goodness.

The cross of Christ drags human merit out into the light of God's holiness and pronounces it guilty and nails it to a cross. And that's not too popular.

The cross of Jesus Christ drags human merit and human works, anything you have ever said, done or given religiously, drags it out into the search light of God's holiness and says, “Filthy rags. Nail it to a cross.”

When one acknowledges the cross of the representative, he takes side with God against him, against his human wisdom, merit, righteousness and says, “With God at the cross there is none good, no not one. There is none righteous. There is none that understandeth.”

Why is it foolishness? It deals with a subject in which they have no interest. And not only that, but it antagonizes them because it deals with their righteousness and merit as a criminal.

And I'll tell you why they don't like the cross. The cross of Christ, thirdly, has to do with declaring openly and positively the righteousness of God.

Do you that...that is what the cross reveals? Listen to Romans 1:16. Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first and also to the Greek for therein is the righteousness of God revealed.” Where? In the gospel, in the cross, the righteousness of God.

Now listen to me. Not only does the sinfulness of men require a cross, but the righteousness of God requires a cross. Do you know the average religionist never wrestles with these questions? How can man be just with God? He doesn't wrestle with that question. Why not? Because he has never seen the holiness of God or the sinfulness of man. He never wrestles with the question: How can he be clean that is born of a woman? That is for a man that is unclean in the sight of God to be troubled about. He never wrestles with this question: How can God be just and justify me? How can...you know when Isaiah saw the Lord, high and lifted up his train filled the temple and the

seraphims and cherubims cried, "Holy, holy, holy." Isaiah said, "Oh, woe is me. I am cut off. I am undone. I am unclean branch of an unclean tree. I am finished. Mine eyes have seen the Lord, the King, the Lord of hosts. I have seen the Lord. I am cut off."

Then he started asking questions. How can God be holy and merciful to me? How can God be righteous and redeem me? How can God be just and justify me? That's when you become interested in a cross and a ransom and a Redeemer. That's right.

In most churches in our land today this subject is not going to be dealt with. Do you know why? It is a subject in which the people have no interest. They have no interest. They are good folks. Their preacher told them they were good. Their mothers told them they were good. Their daddies told them they were good. Everybody...they're good people, wonderful people, fine people. They are not sinners. They are against sinners. We can't...we can't even have a man run for the Supreme that smoked a little marijuana back in 1960. We got a clean requirement now.

I hope they don't start investigating those fellows that are already in there. This is a clean...this is a religious nation. This is a religious nation. This...we are going to expose them in the media, the tabloids and all...yeah, that's right. That's right. Nobody will run for president now because he is scared of being examined. We are clean good people. Our churches are full of good people.

So why do we need a cross? And we are certainly not going to let our human merit and human works and human goodness be drug out into the streets and crucified. Foolishness.

But watch here. I'm glad that's not all. He says in verse 18, "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, are perishing foolishness. But unto us that are saved, that cross and all that is implied and included and accomplished is the very power of God."

You know what it says down here in verse 23? "We preach Christ crucified. To the Jew a stumbling block, unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them that are called, unto them that are called..." Hey, I have heard that voice. "To them that are called, it is the power of God. It is the wisdom of God."

What is this call? Everybody hasn't been called. You...you were chosen, do you know that? Oh, many are called, but few are chosen. Everybody hasn't heard this. What is this call? Well, let's see what the Bible says about this call. Let me just read you this.

In Romans one it says, "Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ."

Romans eight says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them who love God, who are the called, the called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he predestinated. Whom he predestinated he called."

1 Corinthians one says, "God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son."

Galatians 1:15 said, "God separated me from my mother's womb and called me."

Ephesians 4:4 says, "There is one body, one Spirit even as you are called in one hope of your calling."

What is this calling? Well, turn to 2 Thessalonians. I will have you turn to this one. Let's see what this calling is. Now to them that are perishing this cross and all that's included and all that is accomplished is foolishness, but to them that are called, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, they are called. It says here in 2 Thessalonians two, "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit an belief of the truth and he called you. He called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." He chose you. He loves you. He chose you. And he calls you.

This calling is a spiritual birth. It is an awakening. This calling is an effectual call by the Spirit of God. This calling is a gospel call. It is a gospel call.

And with this call.... look back at our text now. I want you to look at this text again, 1 Corinthians one. Verse 23 says, "Christ to the Jew is a stumbling block, to the Greek foolishness, but to them who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God." Christ crucified...that's what we're talking about, Christ on the cross is the very power of God and the wisdom of God.

You see, with this call comes a knowledge of sin. With this call comes a profound interest in how God can be just and justify the sinner. With this call comes an understanding.

I told my class this morning I grew up in a Baptist Church, in a fundamental Baptist Church in the same type of church that we have so many of around here, just a fundamental missionary Southern Baptist Church. And I'll not...I wasn't a nominal attender. My father was a deacon. I was there every service, every revival meeting, every service, every prayer meeting, every Bible conference, every BTU, every Sunday school class I was there and so was my family until I went away in the navy when I was 17 years old. And then I came back and started right back. I married the church secretary and worked with the young people and came up here and worked with the young people. And then went to preacher's school and pastored a church.

And I never one time...I went to a preacher's school. I sat in the seminary and classes of theology and never one time heard anybody talk about or teach or read anything about the attributes of God almighty, never, never, not one time.

God is love. We were in the soul winning business. We were in the soul winning business. We were promoting religion. We were trying to get people to accept Jesus. Why? I don't know. But which Jesus? We're not sure. But just accept Jesus. We were in the soul winning business.

You know what I am talking about. Some of you grew up the same way.

I never heard...nobody ever took the time, no preacher, teacher, ever took the time to try to get me to understand like Isaiah of old or Job. Job said, "I have heard of you with the ear. Now I see you. Therefore I hate myself."

Isaiah said when King Uzziah died, "I was busy with King Uzziah writing all about him and he died. I saw the Lord." And I cried, "I am cut off. I am undone."

Nobody ever took the time to tell me of the majesty and holiness and greatness of God, the preeminence and sovereignty of God, the incomprehensible, unapproachable God who dwells in a light to which no man can approach. I never entertained the notion, "Well, I thought God was sort of, you know, trying to get everybody to come to church." I thought everybody was running around in God's presence and he is patting us on the head when we do good and shaking his finger in our face when we did bad. But I didn't find out that when Adam sinned we got put out of the presence of God. I didn't know that.

I just thought a fellow just said, "Oh, God," and God responded, sort of like pulling a bell. You are pulling a chain and God comes running.

What I didn't know that...that we are not in touch with God anymore. Our sins have separated us from God. Did you know that?

God doesn't hear you. God doesn't hear you. God doesn't do any business with you, none whatsoever.

When you say, "Oh, God," he doesn't hear you. You never...you are never in God's presence, never, never, never, never. We have been separated from God by our sins.

The only one who can bring us to God is Christ. Did you know that? He died, Don, that he may bring us to God. We are not there. He brought us. We are out of the God business.

But we won't be denied. We will admit it to god, then. Children of the lesser god. He is not as big as the one we read about, but he is a god. He is not sovereign he is not almighty, but he is a god. We give him that name, God. G-O-D. Little g with...and we got us valet and we name him Jesus.

But the God, I didn't hear about him. I didn't hear about him. I didn't hear about the awesome God.

It said, "No man can look on me and live."

And I didn't hear about how...what happened in the garden, how depraved and defiled and wretched and vile and filthy we are. None can please God. In the flesh dwelleth no good thing. I...I didn't see from the soul of my feet to the top of my head nothing but wounds and bruises and putrefying soars. They...nobody told me about that. Did they tell you that, Doris? You grew up in church.

That God is holy and righteous, men are sinful and depraved, that God is just and true. And in order for God to show mercy to defiled creatures is something got to take place in here. There is something got to take place. Somebody has got to represent these to him and him to them. Somebody who can touch God and somebody who can touch men. There is no communication between this man and this holiness. And that someone who is the mediator, the one mediator and high priest has got to come from him, not from them. And he has got to be one with him and numbered with them. And he has got to do for them what he has required. He can't change.

See what I am talking about?

We are not going to send any ambassador...we are not going to go up to heaven and bring Christ down. He has got to be sent on the initiative of him, on the direction of him and to accomplish his glory and his mission and his work and his holiness. He sent him down here made in the likeness of sinful flesh, took on himself the form of a servant, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross that he might bring us to God.

And I will tell you this. When he brings us to God he is going to bring us holy, spotless, unblameable and undefiled or God will spit us out again. Do you see what I am saying?

“Well, I am doing the best I can.”

Sorry, it's not good enough.

“Well, I am putting forth an effort.”

You are wasting your time.

“But I am going to go to God and see if he won't receive me. At least I...”

Forget it. He can't and be God. How can we be just with God? You figure out a way. Get them baptized. Bring them down to the front. You have said Jesus. Pray the sinner's prayer. Sign the card. Join the church. Give your tithe. Quit smoking. Quit drinking. Straighten up your life. God will accept you.

No he won't.

Now your God will, but that one won't. He can't. Your God can. He can't. Do you see what I am saying? Do understand what I am saying? It is critical. It is a crisis. And that is the reason to them that are being saved by that God, being saved, being called, being

saved, being redeemed by that God, the cross is not foolishness to them. Under God it is a joy. It is the very power of God and the wisdom of God. It is what enables God to be who he is and what he is and stay where he is and take me to him. That is as plain as I can make it.

But nobody ever told me that, Charlie Fay. Nobody. I was playing church. Ed, you were, too. All the rest of us playing church, every one of us. Nobody ever told me that there is a critical...there is a crisis. There is a...there is a something...Shake heaven. Something...angels standing around in amazement look at. God acting, working, accomplishing a mystery to enable that God to save that bunch of wiggling maggots and lift them from the dung hill to the throne, holy, unblameable and perfect.

Do you...?

That's magnificent. And you just tell me who is saying that and I will have him come here and preach it to you. Go out there and get me one of them.

You say, "Oh, so and so said a good thing."

But he didn't say this. This is the good thing. The cross is the good thing. And God's justice in operation and mercy in operation and righteousness in operation through a representative. That's the good thing. And if you don't say that you haven't said any good things. No good news for me.

Righteousness says with these scales of holiness I have weighed men and found them wanting. I tried them, all of them and I found them lighter than vanity. I have not only found men destitute of all that God requires and all that God is, but I have found men in full rebellion and enmity against God. And I have found men contrary to all that God is, says and does. And I say that men cannot be justified at the expense of God's holy law and God's holy character because the living God hath pronounced wrath against all sin and to free one sinful man without a perfect obedience to God's law and justice will be to retract all that God has spoken. It can't be done.

But love speaks. Now listen. Love speaks. "Oh, Lord, thou art plenteous in mercy and thou art almighty power of God and thou art wise. Is there not in your wisdom, a way? May not by your wisdom and power a ransom be found? May not an atonement be made? Can one be found to stand as a mediator? Can one be found who is without sin? Can one be found whose character is such that he can bear thy wrath and satisfy thy justice and thy holiness? Is there not in all of heaven one who can be identified with men and accepted of thee? Is there not one? Is there not one in heaven who can satisfy your justice and put away your wrath? Is there not one who can honor your holiness? Can one be found who can die to put away man's sin and yet live to plead his wounds? Is there not one? Oh, God, if such a one can be found, surely his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Prince of Peace."