

1Corinthians 17-12-10a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. Now that my microphone is on. This is Sunday, December the 10th, 2017.

We continue our study in the book of 1 Corinthians. We're resuming in chapter 1, verse 18. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Let's take a moment as we begin our time of fellowship in God's word this morning to go to the Lord in prayer. We'll remember each other, remember the opportunities that we have to benefit from the spiritual gifts that God has distributed in our midst, our conversation, our mutual encouragement, musical appreciation. We're going to have an extra dose of that this morning.

And most of all, the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit that unites us in the body of Christ. Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for this opportunity to spend time together in fellowship and in the study of your word. We thank you for the portion of it that we have before us this morning, this great letter from the Apostle Paul, and we ask that as we look at it together that your Holy Spirit will illuminate the truth of it, help us to understand its meaning and its pertinence to ourselves and our opportunities as we bear witness to the Lord Jesus in our surroundings, our relationships, our contacts, our communities, our families, especially as the holiday season approaches.

We pray that these things will become a source of motivation and guidance and encouragement as we endeavor to speak the truth in love, both with one another and to the world outside. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you have turned by now to 1 Corinthians 1, you'll remember the city to which this letter was written, its cosmopolitan nature, its erudite intellectual environment. There are a lot of wise men speaking wise things, and the Apostle Paul came a few years earlier and shared the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many became believers and started down the road of faith and growth.

And after his departure, Apollos came and gave his perspective and his unique ministry of the Word of God. And people began to talk and to debate and to absorb and attempt to amalgamate into the straightforward gospel and scriptural teaching of Paul this worldly wisdom. And as they talked to their fellows, their families and their contacts in the community, they have begun to reason and to try to justify logically their faith.

And in their attempts to persuade others, they're taking a logical approach, trying to vindicate the work of Christ and the plan of God in general on the foundation of reason, which of course was popular in that day. You had the Greek philosophical tradition that was a few hundred years old by then. And of course the Romans were very practical, and so in the Roman Empire you had this wedding of philosophy with early science, if you will, the practical outworking of

knowledge in accomplishments.

You have concrete, you have the arch, you have via Appia and the other great Roman roads and technologies of the day that made things go. And they were nowhere more evident than in Corinth. So Paul is writing, and he says, you have a lot of people who have split up into philosophical camps.

I like the Apollos approach. I like the Paul approach. Well, I just like the teachings of Christ.

We're beginning to have accounts circulating of Jesus' own teaching, and that's what I want to appeal to. And so Paul says that Christ is not divided. You can't boil the gospel down to one or another philosophy and give it a name and try to substitute that for the presence and power of God in the person and work of the Holy Spirit who brings Christ to us, who is the means of uniting us with Christ in His body and in His plan and purpose.

So he goes on to say, after discussing baptism, verse 17, Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. And we've looked at that because there's a contrast. Stop and think about it.

Wisdom of words. What is that? That is the abstract, ethereal realm of debate, right? Is it better to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them? Well, you haven't actually done anything yet if you're Hamlet and you're soliloquizing. You're just thinking, should I just bear my bodkin and run myself through and be done with it or should I struggle and resist and oppose this sea of troubles? Well, it's a valid problem.

It's a good thing to think about. But the debate itself, the question is, you haven't done anything when you're debating. You're thinking about doing something and the quality of that debate, the quality of the argument is largely dependent on how solid are your assumptions, how good are your facts, how persuasively can you organize evidence and say, well, this is better than this.

In this particular climate, with this particular amount of shade and sunshine, this kind of grass seed will give me the best lawn or that kind of sod will give me the best lawn. Well, it's a worthwhile subject. It's useful and it's helpful to think about many things in the practical realm.

But debating them in and of itself, you might finally conclude, well, in this particular situation, I think Bermuda is the way to go. Well, that's all well and good. But if you don't then go out and get some grass and put it on the ground and water it, you're never going to have a lawn just having done the wisdom of words.

So Paul says, I didn't come to you with wisdom of words. I didn't come to you with a debate and a persuasive, logical argument. I came to you with the cross of Christ, the gospel.

Now, what's the difference? When you preach Christ and him crucified, as he's going to go on

to say in the next verse or two, it's not a matter of what is my evidence, what is the logical persuasion, how much of it makes sense, the forensics of it, the redemption, reconciliation, propitiation. When you preach the cross of Christ, what's the difference between that and the wisdom of words? It's a fact. This has all happened within the living memory of the people to whom Paul has come.

There are Jews in the Corinthian community who were either present themselves or have relatives down in the Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee area. This information is known. It's a historic fact.

Jesus Christ came, he preached, he healed, he raised the dead, he did many wonders demonstrating who he was and where he came from, and he was crucified. And now there are a variety of apostles preaching in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, and the apostle Paul has come and preached to them that that same Jesus who was crucified and was executed by the Romans is raised and is alive, and Paul is an eyewitness to the risen Lord. He preaches the message of the cross, which is what Paul delivers as of first importance.

Christ died according to the scriptures. In other words, he fulfilled the Old Testament scriptures that said he would come and suffer. There are no New Testament scriptures.

We tend to think, well, Christ died according to the scriptures. That's Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. There was no Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John when Paul wrote these words.

They hadn't circulated. They hadn't been formalized yet. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

He is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and that he was buried, and that he was raised again the third day according to the scriptures, the sign of Jonah, the Old Testament witness that said he would come. That's the message of the cross. So you can say here's what happened, or you can say, well, here's what I think should happen, and here are the reasons why.

You can either have an abstraction in the wisdom of words, or you can say this is what God has done. Remember John 3.16? Almost, I would say a majority of unbelievers have heard John 3.16, and a lot of them can quote it. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

Whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. That's the message of the cross. I'm telling you what happened.

I'm telling you as an eyewitness firsthand, I have met the risen Lord. Here's what he did. You should believe in him.

He is the answer. He is the way, the truth, and the life. So it's a fait accompli versus an abstract argument, right? That's what Paul is getting at here.

He says, y'all are debating words. And then in verse 18 where we pick up this morning, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. It is the power of God.

It's foolishness to those who are perishing. It's interesting when you look at Greek, I won't go into too much gory detail here, but when it says those who are perishing, this is actually the word related to apolumi. This is apoluminois, which is the participle form, but it's a middle voice.

You remember in Greek, we haven't talked about this in a while, but you've got the active voice. I hit the ball. The subject produces the action on the direct object, right? That's an active voice.

The passive voice, the ball hit me or I was hit by the ball. Something happens to the subject. I was hit by the ball.

That would be passive. I was just walking along minding my own business. Somebody swung a bat and the ball hits me.

In Greek, you have something we don't have in English, which is the middle voice. The middle voice is often reflexive. It can be a reflexive middle where I do something to myself.

I hit myself with the bat. I hit myself with the golf club. I hooked myself with my fishing line and hook.

Or you do something in your own interest. I bought myself some bait. I bought myself a ball.

It's a middle where the subject is involved in the action, but it has results that create a condition for the actor, the subject. That's the middle voice that you have here. Those who are perishing, it didn't just happen to them.

It wasn't because of God's decree or lack thereof. It wasn't because of a lack of election or a lack of some necessary thing. They just weren't given the grace.

This is a middle voice. They are involved in the action of perishing. They have perished themselves, is one way of looking at it.

These who are perishing themselves, you see this reflexive idea that they're involved in their own perishing. They have some responsibility and control over this perishing. It's a middle voice, but you look at the next one, but to us who are being saved, it's a pure passive.

We did nothing. We are being saved. It's entirely by grace.

We're not involved in our own salvation in this sense. There's another passage where Paul says, work out your own salvation, but this is talking about status. There are two kinds of people in the world, those who are perishing because they choose to perish.

They are perishing themselves and those who are being saved, and that's us. We are being saved. So that's in verse 18.

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. Why? Because they are applying to it this wisdom of words. Paul says, I didn't come to you with wisdom of words.

If you're going to base your reaction, your response on wisdom of words, you're in the wrong arena because this isn't something to consider in the abstract. You have got to deal with the fact of the cross. God's already done it.

He's already done it. There is a God. He really did have a son.

He really did come and die for us. God the Holy Spirit will convict you of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and it is a matter of your response. If you're going to try to get there by reason and say, well, this is the better choice out of several different possible gods or possible religions or whatever, you're never going to make it.

For the message of the cross is foolishness. This is the word moros, moron comes from it. It's moronic to those who are perishing themselves.

But to us who are being saved, passive, it is the power of God. So there is an experience of power or there is a response to a debate. You can talk about whether it's good to have a generator or not, or your power can go out and you can be sitting in the dark.

It's two different kinds of situations. You can argue pro and con. What are the odds that the power is going to go off? How much will it cost? Do you need to put in a propane tank? Should you bury the tank? How many watts? How much should you try to run in your house when the power is off? It's the wisdom of words.

Nothing inherently wrong with the wisdom of words, but sooner or later you've got to pull the trigger on a decision. And if the power is out and you're sitting in the dark and you say, you know what, I really need a generator for situations like this. That's the power of God.

Us who are being saved, we have already had an experience of the power of God. We looked around and the lights were out and we said, oh Lord, I need a generator. And he hit the switch and we've got power.

The power of God is in our lives. Well, that ends all debate. You can abstract me with words all you want about the pros and cons.

I've got power now. The power of God is active for us who are being saved. The power is saving us as we speak.

I feel it. I know it. I experience it.

So nobody's going to debate me out of the message of the cross. Nobody's going to debate me

into believing Jesus isn't my Savior. God's not really in heaven.

There isn't a plan and a purpose. There's not an afterlife. I don't have eternal life.

I'm not going to live in the ages to come. It's too late. I was perishing, but no longer.

I am being saved and it's the power of God. So those of us who are being saved, the power of God answers all wisdom or words you might want to apply to it. And notice the next verse, verse 19, for it is written, Paul, so often even with Gentiles, appeals to the Old Testament scriptures.

Why? The word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. If you're not sure what to say to somebody, quote scripture.

It's got power that we know not of, that we can't even anticipate. It is the power of God in written form. It is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

Now we think, well, so are we supposed to just be dumb? Should we just do things on a whim and wait for an impulse and look skyward and when two doves fly over, we know it's time to do God's will in some fashion. What does Paul mean here when he quotes God saying, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise? Well, this is human wisdom. This is man's attempt to build a sophist, a Sophia, a sophisticated.

You know, that's what sophisticated means. It comes from Sophia, which is wisdom. Oh, you're so sophisticated.

So a sophisticated argument, Richard Dawkins makes sophisticated arguments, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens and the other famous atheists. And now, sadly, some of our own who went out from us and are no longer of us, like Bart Ehrman, make sophisticated arguments. And it seems so wise.

And to those who are looking for erudition and qualification and wonderful logical constructs, they build this Tower of Babel in the plane of Shinar, which is your empty mind. You know, I've got this open plane. I'm going to let this guy come in and build something, or I'm going to let somebody bring a basket with a lead lid and the woman is going to be in it.

And when I pull that lid off out, she pops. If you remember our study of Zachariah, I will destroy the wisdom of wise, bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. I want to just read you an example, because when Paul goes on in verse 20 to say, where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Scribe, in verse 20, is a really good translation, because this is grammarius, a grammarian.

But it's technical language. In Paul's vocabulary, and in the vocabulary of the New Testament in general, in the Gospels, when you see scribe, it's this word, grammarius. And this is specifically

the Jewish experts in the law.

In the Jewish community, what is the opposition to the message of the cross, the message that Paul comes and preaches? Well, I don't see that in my Bible. Who says Jesus is the Messiah? You're making all of this up. You're overthrowing the law.

You're doing away with the sacrifices. I've got a tradition and I've got hundreds of years of solid religious background here in my family and my clan and my tribe and my nation, and your message just obviates and overthrows all of that, and I've got Scripture to prove it. I've got Bible authority.

My Old Testament law, prophets, and writings negate all of that. Well, of course they don't. Jesus opened the Scriptures to the disciples, even the two on the road to Emmaus, and showed them all things concerning himself.

What did Paul just say here? And what did I quote him saying? Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He was buried and he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. We've seen a lot of those Scriptures in our most recent study in the prophets.

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? So the wise, these are the sophists. These are the Greek philosophers. Where is the scribe? These are the Jewish.

So he addresses the two subdivisions of the perishing. There are Jews who are perishing because they're clinging to the law rather blindly, tradition of the elders. This is my culture.

This is my heritage. This is what we've always believed. And the Greeks, the Corinthians who are in the cross currents of all of this trade and civilization and cultural pressure, and they want to go back to Plato or Aristotle or somebody and slice and dice this strange message of a crucified man being the key to relationship with the ultimate creator.

And they pooh-pooh it. They dismiss it with their wisdom. So these two, you really have two summed up in the third.

The wise is the Greek wise man. The scribe is the Jewish wise man. Where is the debater of this age? Disputer, this is a really interesting word.

It comes from a fairly common verb. And there's a common noun that comes from it. But this particular noun form that Paul uses here is only found one other place in all of ancient Greek literature.

And it's about a century later in a commentary on Ephesians by one of the church fathers. And he's probably harking back to Paul. Paul virtually coins this word.

Where is the debater of this age? The debater of this age. And this is the IONOS. And anticipating a little bit, we know that IONOS steps back and looks at ages in the sense of dispensations.

There is a coming age. There is the age of righteousness. There is the kingdom age.

There is the future. The everlasting life is life age IONOS, unto the ages, unto the future. So where is the debater of this age? Whether he is a secular argument maker or whether he is a religious argument maker.

Really the scribes here are put for almost any religion. Think about today. Think about right now.

The message of the cross enters into the world. Somebody hears it. What are the alternatives? Well, I can either become a secular materialist.

I can go with science and the atheistic eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow. We're going to return to the base elements from which we are made. Or I can pick one of the other world religions with their holy books and their holy men and their ideas, their philosophies.

These are traditional. Some of them go back hundreds and even thousands of years. I can be a Muslim.

I can be a Hindu. I can be a Buddhist. I can be an Old Testament Judaistic type of person.

And so Paul sort of lumps them all together because the representative religion that he is talking to in Corinth is Judaism, whereas the scribe, the wise man is people that are going to secular philosophy for their parsing of life. What does it mean and what is it good for? So he says, where is the one debating either one of these premises of the age? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of this world? And he switches words here and the word world is cosmos. Remember cosmos.

Ionios has the idea of time, a large chunk of time. It's a span that you're not even real sure where the end of it is in a lot of cases without some context. Cosmos refers to the structure of things around us.

This is where we get the word cosmetics. It is the arrangement of things. If you put some cosmetics on your face, you're trying to arrange it.

You're trying to organize it and make it a pleasing harmony of features. So has God not made moronic the wisdom of this age? Now this word has a very prominent place in the first Corinthian letter. We have it in verse 18.

The message of the cross is foolishness, moros to those who are perishing. It's here in verse 21, in verse 20 and in verse 21. The wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God.

It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. You have foolishness there. Once again, in verse 23, we preach Christ crucified to the Jews, a stumbling block into the Greeks, foolishness, nonsensical, moros.

Down in verse 25, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. So what is Paul preaching into here? What is he responding to as he writes this letter back to the church full of people, this church that he founded, people that he knows and that have begun to fall away from the straightforward spiritual truths that he imparted over nearly two years of teaching and encouragement? People have begun to believe that their faith is foolish and it's on two bases. Either it ought to be the Judaistic version where you achieve relationship with God by works.

The whole book of Galatians, by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. The scribe, the Judaizer, the Jewish wise man and debater is saying you can't just be passively being saved. You've got to get some elbows and knees working here.

You need to be doing something. You need to be functioning under the law like we have done for hundreds of years. What's the modern equivalent of this? Well, if you're going to be a good person, you need to exhibit some good works.

Get involved in a charity. Volunteer at a soup kitchen. Do some things in your life to avoid creating any harm.

The mantra for non-spiritual, non-Christian, non-religious righteousness is to be a good person and the secular humanist and materialist is to do no harm. They basically take the Hippocratic oath and say, as long as I do no harm, I'm okay. I can engage in sexual practices as long as I do no harm of any sort, of any ilk, of any previously judged morality.

As long as I do no harm. Well, pedophiles are bad because they're harming children. But then of course there are societies of pedophiles who say, we're not harming them.

We're enveloping in them in love and attention and valuing them and imparting to them how much we care for them. So how do you define harm? Now, there are people who say, well, I don't want to harm any animals. There are people who say, I don't want to harm the environment.

I don't want to harm the ozone. I don't want to put anything in the landfill. And my righteousness is based on the fact that I recycle.

My righteousness is based on the fact that I... Why do you think people spend so much on alternate fuel cars and will spend two or three times what a car costs to get an electric car? Well, it's a part of their righteousness. I do no harm. I'm not harming them.

I'm not putting carbon emissions into the air and I'm not digging up fossil fuels and I'm using wind power so that I don't have anybody burning coal. This is do no harm. That's the philosophy.

So this wisdom of the age says, this is the path. I can either do it through religion and through works. I can do it through irreligious works or I can live in a world of the mental where it's

about art and literature and living the erudite intellectual life.

It's my intellectual attainments. It's the wisdom that I have. I have these wonderful discussions and look to the heavens and put everything in a context and sort of the Carl Sagan level or the Neil deGrasse Tyson.

Look around at all of the knowledge that we've obtained and let's just wonder at the weirdness of the fact that the universe has woken up and is admiring itself in the person of us and then we'll go back to the elements and that's all there is. Paul says, where is the debater of this age? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of this cosmos organizing ideas in this way? God has made it foolish. In other places Paul talks about the fact that this age is passing away.

If there's this age and it's definite, then it's not the only one. There's another age coming. He's going to make this explicit a little bit later on, but he's laying the groundwork here to talk about how ephemeral and how temporary the ion and the cosmos are.

These religious arguments. We try to read the New Testament now where the Jews are trying to get people to observe the feasts. How much of a problem is that now? How many Christians are in danger of being argued back down to the synagogue in their community instead of attending church on Sunday? They're going to go to the synagogue on Saturday.

How big a threat is the Judaistic argument for the law now? It was huge and Paul said these people nearly got him killed on multiple occasions. They had guys taking vows to God to not eat any food until they killed Paul. Remember that? They had riots.

There were police actions and squads of Roman soldiers coming out to bring order because of the Judaistic argument against the message of the cross. It was huge. Where is it now? Where is the debater of that age for Judaism? It seems so wise.

It seems so right. It seems so persuasive. There were people that were just soaked and steeped and committed and convinced of that.

Where is it now? Has God not made foolish that wisdom? You don't find Jews running around trying to get people back under the sacrificial laws of Moses now. They're not proselytizing. In fact, Judaism prides itself on not proselytizing.

Have you noticed that? If you talk to Jews, there's no Jewish evangelist going out evangelizing for Judaism. When's the last time somebody knocked on your door and said, Hi there, we're from the local synagogue and we'd really love you to come down and visit us on Saturday? They don't do that. That age has passed away and yet it seems so significant and so important.

The same is true of the Greek philosophical arguments of that day. Those arguments are gone. There are new and different arguments for other religions now.

Islam says convert or die, basically. The wisdom of this world is now scientific rather than

philosophical. Science works.

Believe science. We can prove this and that. Science is inflated to be the be-all and end-all.

Paul says, look, these things are passing away. I want to read you a quick something here just as an example. I was very fascinated to read, actually not to read, to listen to an audio book called *The Invention of Air*.

It is basically a biography of Joseph Priestley. He was a scientist. He was a contemporary of Benjamin Franklin.

That's back when you could be an armchair scientist. You could have a lab in your backyard. You could build a building and do experiments.

He asphyxiated frogs and put out candles and did all kinds of things because he was trying to figure out what makes things burn. Joseph Priestley, if you remember from school, is credited with the discovery of oxygen, although it was actually Lavoisier who put a name to oxygen and refined Joseph Priestley's work and figured out what was really going on. But Priestley is the foundation on which the discovery of oxygen and the composition of air and, by the way, of water, as H_2O , is built.

Priestley is huge. He's a foundation stone of modern chemistry. He did this stuff in a shed out back.

His wife got all upset with him for all of the glassware and stuff that was out there. He would trap air in a cup with a candle inside and notice that the candle would go out. It wouldn't just keep burning.

He said, well, there's something in there that is making that candle burn and it is consumed and then there's nothing left. This, of course, was oxygen. He would put frogs and plants and other things in there and the poor little frog would asphyxiate or a mouse or some such thing.

He put an air-breathing animal in there when it used up the air. Well, it stuck its tongue out and died. He wrote a thing, and I'm not going to read you much of it, but he concluded from his observations and he was very logical, very erudite.

The man did hundreds and hundreds of experiments. He came up with the notion and was a strong, ardent advocate that burning was accomplished by an element called phlogiston. There was this stuff called phlogiston.

I'm looking right now at something he published on June 15, 1796. Think about that. Twenty years after the Declaration of Independence, Priestley, he was in England, but he actually came over and met Benjamin Franklin.

They were fellow scientists and had a big time. This is 1796, and he dedicates this work to the opponents of phlogiston. They are the anti-phlogistians, and he names them.

He dedicates this work to it, and it's called Considerations on the Doctrine of Phlogiston. This is P-H-L-O-G-I-S-T-O-N, Phlogiston. Considerations on the Doctrine of Phlogiston and the Decomposition of Water.

This is one of the most erudite, well-reasoned arguments in favor of phlogiston that you will ever find. There have been few, if any, revolutions in science, so great, so sudden, and so general as the prevalence of what is now usually termed the new system of chemistry. This is Lavoisier saying, you know, pal, it's oxygen.

And Priestley says, you know, there's nothing that's been so great, sudden, and general as the prevalence of this new chemistry, or that of the anti-phlogistians. And they are opposed to a man named Stahl, S-T-A-H-L. He was sort of the originator of phlogiston, and Joseph Priestley just jumped on that bandwagon.

He's in it hook, line, and sinker. And they are anti the Doctrine of Stahl, which was at one time thought to have been the greatest discovery that had ever been made in science. Priestley is basically saying, when Stahl came out with phlogiston, it explained so much.

It made so much sense. And now these anti-phlogistians have come out, and they're gumming up the works. So, he is going to publish this thing, and he says, I know that I'm one of the last holdouts for the old argument, but I want to make it anyway.

So, he goes in section 1, he says, according to the Doctrine of Phlogiston, advanced by Becker and Stahl in the beginning of this century, that would have been the beginning of the 1700s, much simplified and improved since their time, metals, such as phosphorus, sulfur, and many other substances which are supposed to contain it, are compounds consisting of this principle and another which may be called its base. You know what happens when you have phosphorus or calcium? Did you ever do that in chemistry class? You know, the stuff is just flammable as all get-out in its pure form. They have to keep it in glycerin or something to keep it from going off.

If oxygen, this is why we have phosphorus in artillery rounds, they burn intensely hot exposed to oxygen. Well, the theory said the reason phosphorus and calcium and other such things burn so fiercely is they're composed of calcium and phlogiston. Phlogiston is built into them, and they'll just go off.

Well, if you want to look this up on the web, it's public domain, you can read it. It is an incredibly erudite, well-reasoned, he appeals to his experiments, and he appeals to the behaviors, he appeals to the weight. These guys, Lavoisier and others that are talking about oxygen and iron rusting in the presence of air, they weigh before and after, and they say something has come out of the air and combined with the iron, it weighs more now.

Something came out of the air. Well, he refutes all of that and says, no, it's phlogiston. And he gets this whole, he is unrepentant, unconvinced, phlogiston is the way.

If you read this, he'll convince you that phlogiston is it, and we're all wrong with oxygen. It is

incredibly erudite, incredibly and closely reasoned, and well-evidenced and supported. Well, he's just as wrong as he can be.

He's as wrong as flat earth. He's as wrong as 6,000-year-old creation. I mean, he's as wrong as you can be.

And yet, to him, it makes more sense than anything else. Well, what happened to the phlogiston argument? How many proponents of phlogiston are there today? You notice I didn't say how many flat earthers there are today because there actually are flat earthers. Go figure.

Ever seen a satellite picture? Ever talked to an astronaut? I mean, even pilots that get up high enough can clearly see the earth as a sphere. I have a hard time figuring out how our satellite Internet works if the earth is flat. Where is this? Where is the debater of that age? He was one of the finest scientific minds of his generation.

Ben Franklin loved him. They were two peas in a pod, and he's just utterly and totally wrong. Where is his debate now? Well, reality has overtaken the wonderful construct, the wisdom of words that he used to constructs here.

It's a thing of beauty. It's fun to read just to watch a great mind at work and to see that there is a way that seems right to a man, and it could just be so completely wrong. And it's a marvel.

It is like a train chugging at full speed down a straight track right off the edge of the Grand Canyon. You think, there but for the grace of God, I could go. Oh, Lord, please show me if I'm that convinced and that wrong.

Humility is teachability. Lavoisier and these other guys published extensively, and Priestley just couldn't see it. He's like the scribe of the Jews.

He's like the wise man of the Greeks. And he says, my way works, and I think my way works better. And there's no talking him out of it.

He died believing in phlogiston, and his work is what gave Lavoisier the clue about oxygen. We would have never found oxygen without Priestley, but Priestley himself never got it. We would never have the message of the cross.

We would never have our understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ without the scriptures that were given to God's people, Israel, that they preserved, that they studied, that they taught. And yet they're so completely wrong when they stop there and don't see the advance, don't see the foundation they provide for the greater truth. Isn't that something? That's what Paul is preaching into here.

That's why he says, and quotes God, God is going to destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent because we're so limited. We're short-sighted. We just can't get all of the facts.

What trumps these wonderful arguments and these tremendous debates and this wisdom of words, the power of God. And if this was the only, if you can only hear half of this morning's study, let me leave you as we go to the break with this application. We who are being saved, what is it that convinces us? Is it that book on apologetics that we read? Was it some wonderful Greek and Hebrew parsing argument that said, well, you know, the scripture says this, and if you align all of these, it says that.

What is it that lets you know that you belong to God through Christ, that the Holy Spirit dwells in your heart, that your prayers are heard, that you've got eternal life, that we're going to rejoin our loved ones and see the face of the Lord Jesus Christ himself someday. What is the most convincing persuasive factor? What did Paul say? I know that the power of God is in me. I have seen the power of God in my own life.

I know what he does to purge my sin, to give me power over temptation, to comfort me in times of discouragement and crisis and my own failure, to build me up and lift me up. I know what he has done in the lives of others who are of like precious faith. And we have an experience of the power of God that passes understanding.

The peace of God in my soul passes understanding. You can't reason it. You can't rationalize it.

You can't build it on a debate or an argument or a tradition. It is the power of God by which we are being delivered. It is all of grace.

It is all of God. It is through Christ. And you can debate away.

You can cite all the science you want. Those of us who have that in our souls just know. This is the key to understanding evangelism because it is ultimately recognition of an unfillable gap, an intense and unaddressable need that we have where we sin and fall short of the ideal.

Which is the glory of God. God has met that need. His power has created something new and eternal within us.

And we have just as much a sense of that as if we saw it with our eyes, heard it with our ears. Peter argues, you've got a better witness. John does the same thing.

Both of them in their epistles talk about that which our eyes have seen, which our hands have handled. We declare to you. But we have a more sure word of prophecy.

And that is the witness of the Holy Spirit in our souls. And how are you going to explain that to the debater of this age, the skeptic? Well, you might as well try to describe the color green to a blind man. It's just impossible.

You have to seek and search and find. God says you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart, not when somebody else debates you into it or argues you into it or destroys the props underneath your current worldview. You can silence somebody you haven't

converted him.

It is an act of choice. It is an act of will to recognize need and to search. As we go to the break, I want to play a piece of music for you, a hymn by Fernando Ortega that I think sums this up very well.

And from that we'll go directly into our break.