Outgoing 11 – 17 November 2011

Problems of the head?

The Link Between Knowledge of God and Salvation by God

Fallen humanity does not know God
1 Samuel 3:7; Psalm 14; Matthew 7:24-27; 11:25-26; John 1:5; 1:18; 5:37-38; 7:28-29; 8:19; 14:17; 15:21; 17:25-26; Romans 1:18; 3:10-18; 8:7; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 2:11-14; 3:18, 19; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 4:17-19; Colossians 1:21; 2:6-8

To know God is to be saved by Him
Proverbs 1:7; Matthew 11:25-30; John 1:10-13, 18; 14:6-9; 17:3; Rom 10:14-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; Eph 4:17-21; 1 Tim 2:3-4

John 8:19 "You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also".

John 14:6-7 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well.

John 17:3 "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

We're not *saved* by works but by God's grace alone

We don't *know* God by our wisdom but by God's revelation alone

Our knowledge of God is just as much a gift as our salvation by God.

DISCUSS: Is that true? If it is true, what are the implications for evangelism?

What about Romans 1?

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and

wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities— his eternal power and divine nature— have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools

What is revealed by creation? What may be known about God! It's maximal. His eternal power (v16 = Gospel), His divine nature (=trinity). Everything is on show. But what do we do? We maximally suppress it.

Paul says we "knew God", why do you think he uses the past tense? What's he referring to when he says "they claimed to be wise but became fools"?

So the unsaved in one sense 'know God' but not in any consciously acknowledged sense – they suppress it all. You can't build on what they suppress.

What about Acts 17?

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.

17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the market-place day by day with those who happened to be there.

18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, What is this babbler trying to say? Others remarked, He seems to be advocating foreign gods. They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?

20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.

21 (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.

23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

24 The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.

25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

29 Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone— an image made by man's design and skill.

30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, We want to hear you again on this subject.

33 At that, Paul left the Council.

Paul babbles on about Jesus and the resurrection. This sounds like strange gods to their ears – it doesn't sound like any god they have ever heard – and the Greeks had heard of them all. They had so many gods that they even made one idol names "Any other god." Literally a god of the gaps. And when Paul sees this "unknown god" he finally finds a point of commonality with the Athenians. What's the one thing Paul agrees about when it comes to these greek gods? The one thing he agrees upon is that they do not know God.

So Paul proclaims Him. And he does it by speaking about Adam and Christ. Did you notice that? Verse 26 gives us "one man" Adam and he is answered by, v31, the Man Jesus Christ. Paul goes back to basics and tells the whole story again – he REFRAMES their questions within a very different frame – a gospel frame.

And he uses some quotes from popular greek authors: Epimenides and Phaenomena. It's the equivalent of a preacher citing the latest pop song. Of course he uses these Greek quotes to speak *against* Greek culture. He's saying "If you really believed what you sing about, how could you live how you live?" Paul is not vindicating the latent wisdom of the Greeks, he is exposing their foolish inconsistencies. Epimenides spoke far better than he knew and far better than the Greeks lived. On the *preacher's* lips the truth is commandeered and pressed into gospel service. Yet on the poet's lips it stands only to reveal their folly. But such folly must end… they must repent, that is – they must stop thinking this way.

Acts 17 is not an example of a bit of Greek wisdom and a bit of God's revelation meeting somewhere in the middle. It's the revelation of God coming down and reframing everything. (We'll think about that concept of reframing later).

What would convince the world to believe?

What do you think?

“Until god appears before me as a burning bush or I see his picture on the front of popular science magazines I will remain a non-believer.”

> The world demands wisdom or power.
> What does God give them? The cross!

1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5

> 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. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of
> the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." 20 Where is the wise man?
> Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish
> the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its
> wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was
> preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks
> look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and
> foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks,
> Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser
> than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. 26
> Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by
> human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God
> chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of
> the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the
> despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, 29 so that
> no-one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who
> has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and
> redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."
> **2:1** When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I
> proclaimed to you the testimony about God. 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was
> with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness and fear,
> and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and
> persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith
> might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

In America there's a ridge running up and down the Rocky Mountains – it's called the Continental Divide. Any water that falls on this ridge has to go one way or the other. A raindrop may fall on this ridge and if it trickles to the west it ends up in the Pacific Ocean. The next drop may fall on that very same place and trickle off to the east. It will end up in the Atlantic Ocean. Consecutive drops of water will fall on same ridge, but eventually thousands of miles will separate them.

That's what the cross does to the whole human race. We are all divided into *only* two camps heading to only *two* destinations.

Verse 18 speaks of two kinds of person: there are "those who are perishing", and there are "those who are being saved." The whole human race divides into the perishing and the saved.

Perishing is a word we use to describe food going off, just left to decay. When the way of all things takes its course, the food perishes. The bible says *we're* like that. This world is like that.

Keep the clock ticking and this world will run down and decay. And you will run down and decay. It's the way of all flesh.

Think of a Christmas tree. Fresh and green and smelling great. But it's chopped down, wrenched from its life source and taken away from its natural habitat. The moment that tree was cut down it started perishing. It still looks great on the outside. All through Christmas it gets dressed up in beautiful decorations, brought into the warmth, surrounded by family and celebrations. But it's perishing. It starts dropping needles, and turning a little brown. Never mind, we hoover up the decay and keep celebrating. But then at some point in January, we throw this dry, decaying, lifeless firewood onto the rubbish heap.

That's us. We began life in the Garden of Eden. We were fresh and green and alive. But we decided to go it alone. We were cut off from our lifesource in the Lord and ever since we've been perishing. Perishing! And the clock is ticking.

Oh we can pretty ourselves up. Like a Christmas tree, we can look nice and fancy, we can adorn ourselves with all sorts of good looks and good works – like decorations on a Christmas tree. We can surround ourselves with family and celebrations, but we're perishing. We have no life in us. And we're destined for the rubbish heap.

But there's another kind of human being. Verse 18 says there are those being saved. There are those lifted out of this perishing condition. There are those who find rescue from the way of all flesh.

But those are the only options for the human race. We are either saved or still perishing.

The world is not ultimately divided into rich and poor. It's not ultimately divided into East and

West. It's not ultimately divided into left-wing, right-wing. It's not ultimately divided into black and white. It's not divided into religious-types and non-religious types. And listen to me here, the world is not ultimately divided into good people and bad people. That's irrelevant in the end. THE divide that splits the human race is this: there are those who are perishing and there are those who find salvation.

You're either saved or you're perishing. And the ultimate destinations of these two groups could not be more different. Far more than the 3000 miles that separate the Atlantic and the Pacific – the destinations of these two groups are heaven and hell.

Well then, what makes the difference between the two? What is the divide between perishing and salvation? Look at verse 18 again, see if you can spot what makes the difference:

> 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.

Do you know what makes all the difference in the world? A message.

A simple message passed on by word of mouth. That's what changes eternities.

Something that graciously comes *to* the world. The world doesn't figure it out, a message comes and proclaims it. But that's the vehicle – a message.
And if that didn't sound weak enough – it's a message about the cross.

It's a message that says this: Jesus Christ is the Lord of Glory – that's what He's called in chapter 2, verse 8. He is the Lord of Glory, He was there in the beginning, the Craftsman of Creation, the One forever-loved by the Father, the Eternal Son of God – this Lord of Glory was strung up on a beam of wood, iron nails driven through His hands and feet, dissected on full view of the world. And when His heart had given out they thrust up a spear under His rib cage to burst Him wide open. The Lord of Glory accursed, godforsaken, butchered – and THIS is what saves a perishing world.

And perhaps you're asking, How? How does that save the world?

Well… here is the Lord taking responsibility for His world. His world is perishing, so what does He do? He takes what's coming to us. He enters in, He sums it up, He stands at the Head of a perishing world, and a perishing people, and He takes what is coming to us.

We deserve to be accursed, we deserve to be godforsaken, we deserve to perish in the darkness but **Christ died for us**. He took to Himself what was coming to us. And He put it all to death.

The Lord of Glory perished and He perished for you. To save you from that fate.

This is…

The Cross-Shaped Message

If the world wants power or wisdom – how will the message of the cross be received?

Verses: 19-21...

Paul really wants to take on the wise man, but he doesn't think you'll be able to find one. You can find lots of clever people in the world but you can't find any who have reasoned their way to God.

The world through its wisdom does not know God.

The sincere Hindu, the devout Muslim, the learned Jew – they do not know God. The professor of philosophy whose water-tight arguments convince her of a Higher Power – she does not know God. The scientist whose experiments and calculations lead him to conclude there must be some kind of intelligent Designer for the universe – does not know God. Your friends and mine who reason that there's more to life than what they can see and, may even occasionally pray and, heck, they even speak about someone 'Up there' and they call him 'God' – they do not know God. Whatever human wisdom leads us to, it doesn't lead us to God.

Why?

Because (v21) God in His wisdom set things up this way. This is how it pleases Him to operate.

God doesn't sit up in heaven, sprinkle a few clues around on earth and wait for the clever clogs of the world to piece together the evidence. Knowing God is not like a big treasure hunt with cryptic clues that only the wise of this world can decipher.

He comes down to be known. We stare up at the heavens a speculate. He comes down and reveals Himself. Because the way He wants to be known is *personally*.

But we don't want to know God personally. We'd far rather speculate. That's what the power people and the wisdom people have in common. Actually they want God at a distance (because they don't like God and they don't want Him close).

Verses 22-25…

Some want God to show up in power. Others want God to show up in wisdom. We're all temperamentally like this. Some of us say 'It doesn't have to make sense to me but if God just showed up in some powerful way, that would do it for me.' Others would say 'I don't need a

burning bush, if someone could just prove it to me, show me it's reasonable, then I'd believe.'

And so the Jewish type of person from v22 says "I will believe in Jesus when I see a miracle." Here's the hoop God must jump through, He must perform this miracle then I'll believe. It's saying to God "If you're really God you'll act like this." I heard someone say the other day if he looked up at the night sky with a telescope and saw the stars spelling out the ten commandments, then he'd believe. That's the sign he was demanding. What does God give him? Christ crucified. Paul would say 'why are you star-gazing?' – look at the cross. There you see God.

The Greek type of person from v22 says 'I will believe in God if God looks reasonable to my way of thinking.' That's the hoop God must jump through, He must match up with what I already think is reasonable, then I'll believe. It's very much like what the Jew was demanding when the Jew demanded a sign. It's saying 'If you're really God you will be like this.' Everyone's got this preconceived job description that God needs to fit. And we say "Jesus, if you fit into my idea of God then I'll worship you." Some demand sign, some demand philosophical proofs – but everyone's asking God to pass our little tests. What does God actually give us? Christ crucified.

The cross splits the world and the job of the messenger of the cross is not to mend the tear. We placard this divisive cross and if it's a stumbling block to some, then so be it.
Therefore those who preach Christ should be prepared to be scorned as the most frustrating, bemusing, scandalous, pathetic God-peddlers imaginable. Christian preachers just don't give people what they want.

Instead we preach Christ crucified and to all the miracle seekers out there, it's like dumping a massive great stone in their way. They're gazing up into the heavens waiting for a sign and they trip over this giant stumbling stone. And the miracle seeker says 'Idiot! Why did you put this stumbling stone in my way – I'm off to seek miracles.' And the preacher says – look at what this stumbling block is – it's Christ crucified. Stop seeking miracles and look to the cross – that's where God has shown up in power.

Do you think we will be thanked for putting out the cross like a stumbling stone?

Or think about how the wisdom seekers will react. We speak about a bloodied man struggling for breath, executed as a criminal and we call it the wisdom of God. They are going to call out 'foolishness'.

The power-people think it's weak. The wisdom-people think it's foolish. Nonetheless we proclaim the message of the cross.

And in verse 24 there's a *true* miracle that can happen. Someone can look at the cross and say "My Lord and My God!" In amidst this perishing world, someone can see the perishing LORD

and say, “THERE is God’s power and wisdom.” And whenever that happens another soul is saved. Through the foolish message of the cross.

So that’s the Cross-Shaped Message that we proclaim. But Paul goes on to speak of the church as a Cross-Shaped People…

v26:

> 26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no-one may boast before him.

Jesus looked like a real loser didn’t He? Executed as a criminal aged 33. Just three years of public ministry then His people call for His blood and He’s dispatched. He looked like a total loser to the world. So what will His people look like? I’m afraid there’s no way around this. We’re going to look (v28) like “<u>lowly</u>”, “<u>despised</u>” <u>nobodies</u>. Lowly, despised, nobodies.

But God wants it that way. A weak and foolish-looking cross, produces a weak and foolish-looking people. And God’s got His reasons for doing it this way.

Remember back at school when team captains picked players for their football side? It was always the best players chosen first and then me at the end. But God chooses differently. He’d be like the captain who says ‘Let’s have the Australian with two left feet.’ God’s like the captain who picks the fat kid, the cross-eyed nerd and the chronic asthmatic – **<u>all</u>** so that He can shame the team of all-stars.

Because the people who worship at the foot of the cross KNOW they’ve got nothing – and God wants it that way. He chooses to have this kind of community. So the world will know we are nothing. Christ is our EVERYTHING.

Now when we put on an evangelistic event – perhaps a men’s breakfast or a women’s breakfast – who do we want to invite as a speaker to advertise the Christian message?

We usually pick the wise and the strong. But the church is a community of nobodies. We are nobodies who can say to the world: “I am nothing. Christ is my everything.”

And He’s my everything because of 5 wonderful words in verse 30. Look down to verse 30 and see these words addressed to the believer:

you are in Christ Jesus.

What does that mean? What does it mean to be IN Christ?

Well think of the Christmas tree – perishing, decaying, no life in it. Jesus Christ comes into this world, fully connected to the true Lifesource in God. He puts to death our perishing ways on the cross, and opens His arms to us to say – COME, Get grafted into me. COME, share in MY life. COME, be united to the true Lifesource again. And those who trust Jesus are grafted in. They become united to Jesus. They are IN Him.

And now Christ is their everything. They don't need to be strong and wise in the world's eyes because Jesus has become their all-in-all.

What does the church look like? It looks like a bunch of nobodies gathered around a foolish looking cross, but shining with an other-worldly confidence.

What does the preacher of such a message look like?

The Cross Shaped Messenger

> 1 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.
> 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.
> 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.
> 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,
> 5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

We don't just preach a cross-shaped message, we preach it in a cross-shaped way.

The danger Paul sees in preaching with worldly wisdom is not that the world might not believe you. The danger is that the world might *believe* you – then their faith rests on men's wisdom.

E.g. – Imagine you get people to ground their faith in the bible in the fact that contemporary Jewish historians confirm the events of Scripture. What if those Jewish historical documents are found to have been altered over time, or their own historical accuracy is challenged. That's an easy one. What about…

E.g.2 – Imagine you an atheist hears a Christian philosopher give a really good argument for God's existence. He's convinced. How long is he convinced for? Until he finds an atheist philosopher who casts doubt on the argument.

If our faith rests on men's wisdom, it's only as good as men's wisdom. If it rests on God's power then it's secure. And what is God's power? Christ crucified.

REFRAMING

If this is true then evangelism is not about answering question after question, building their knowledge up until they've reached a certain level of intellectual satisfaction.

Salvation is coming to know Jesus in a personal way, therefore it's much more like a marriage. When I stood at the front of church to say vows to Emma, did I know everything about her? Did she know everything about me? No chance. How do you think I tricked her into it? The truth was not on my side. But now that we are married we're realizing more and more things about each other. And we've only been married 8 years, but already we're looking back on that naïve couple in 2003 and thinking "We had no idea who we were, who the other person is." If you'd asked me in 2003, Glen do you know everything about Emma? I'd have said, No – but I know enough to trust her.

Those who are married here: Before you got married, was the primary way you got to know your partner a heavy-duty question and answer session? I'm guessing not. How did you get to know your partner?

Question number two: Now that you are married, have you stopped having questions about your partner? I haven't. My questions are much more intense now! "Why on earth do you do things *that* way?!"

Becoming a Christian is the same. Question and answers don't really get you to the point of being a Christian. Questions happen along the way, but you get to know Jesus by hearing His story. And then once you are a Christian, the questions don't end. In fact the questions really begin when you're a Christian – don't you find?

Therefore we must never give the impression that 'answering questions' is the way to bring a person to faith, nor to give the impression that once you're satisfied about a certain number of questions, then you can become a Christian. It's just not like that.

Instead we should see questions as an opportunity to tell the story again. That's how we turn questions to our advantage. We're asked a question, and really our duty is to "know nothing except Christ and Him crucified." And how we do that is to reframe the questions, reflect the question back, refocus the question onto Christ and Him crucified…

Reframing means taking a question out of the context it's presented in and putting it into a gospel frame. We take the question as an opportunity to tell a different story.

So a question comes like: "It would be awful if God existed, He would be like a 24/7 CCTV camera in the sky!" The *worst thing* we can do is agree to the terms of the question. The way that God is described here is simply not the bible's way. So the old "Which god are you talking about?" it absolutely vital. And what is this god doing? Is He this moral policeman who has nothing better to do than examine my income tax returns? No the bible's picture is very different. Jesus reveals a God who doesn't stay in heaven to watch, but come and gets His hands dirty to be with us... Reframe the question by letting Jesus define the terms.

Say "I don't recognise the god you're talking about. Jesus came down to be *with us* are you saying that you don't want to be "with Jesus"?

Do you see how different that is, now that it's reframed, with Jesus at the heart? There are millions of gods I would rather were not around. But if *Jesus* can't take His eyes off me, that's only because He loves me. Completely reframed.

Don't be afraid to **refocus** the question also. Remember, everyone's a believer, everyone has a god. So whatever question they're asking about our God, they should be ready to answer for their own god hadn't they? It's not like we're people of faith who have to "defend our beliefs" and they are without faith and so cannot be questioned. Turn the question around on them. How would you refocus this question?

One way would be: "It's very convenient for us to think of God as a CCTV camera in the sky. We don't actually want him near – but that's not because He is bad company, it's because *we* are."

Or: "You think it's a dog-eat-dog world and the fittest survive. That sounds pretty exhausting to me. You're the one who has to perform for your god. But your god just doesn't care. You have a 24/7 examination and then you're on the rubbish heap." Pity!

*You certainly don't have to **refocus** and it could lead to some conversational cul-de-sacs while they protest that you've got them all wrong. So refocusing is not at all a necessary step.*

But the whole point of this is to **reveal**. You're telling the Jesus story again to the person, with their question as the prompt. Because you know that the way you get to trust someone is by being immersed in their world and hearing their story, so that's what your focus is. Telling the gospel story.

How would you reveal the gospel story again with this question as the prompt?

"Jesus knows us inside out and actually it doesn't make Him judge us from on high, it makes Him stoop down to save us. He draws close, takes our sin and suffering, spreads His arms on the cross and *takes* all our judgement. All so that we might have fellowship with Him. Jesus

draws near as in a marriage. And I don't call my wife a CCTV camera!"

Now it's your turn... Reframe, Reflect, Reveal

1) If God is all loving, all knowing and all powerful, how can he allow suffering?
2) If God knows everything, why pray?
3) Religion causes wars

Recommended Reading:

Galatians 1-6

What is the gospel?
What is the greatest threat to the gospel?

NEXT WEEK... **Matters of the heart**

Why don't we evangelise? Fear, pride, spiritual dryness.
The solution? Return to the Fountain!