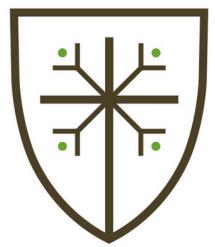


COME WHAT MAY



January 7, 2026

In 1799, German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher published, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. Enlightenment philosophy had done much to affect the thinking of those surrounding him in Berlin at that time. Many began to think Christianity and its doctrine irrelevant, if not impossibly false, because the latest intellectual trends said so. Schleiermacher's solution to this situation was not to re-introduce orthodoxy to a modern audience, but to abandon it. Rather than the Christian faith consisting of objective belief in who God is, what he has done, and to what he calls us, Schleiermacher stated that religion was most importantly about subjective experience. The seat of divine revelation was the individual, he said. Neither the truth of Scripture nor the doctrine of the Trinity mattered if the subjective individual decided they didn't. The results of this were and continue to be disastrous to such a degree that in the 20th century famed theologian Karl Barth believed Schleiermacher had reduced theology to anthropology.

What Schleiermacher encountered in the 18th century was nothing new. From its very beginning in the first century, people have derided Christianity as irrelevant, false, or even dangerous. In Peter's speech at Pentecost, he responded to derision that Christians filled with the Spirit were actually drunk with wine (Acts 2:15). Marcus Aurelius despised Christians and said they died for their faith out of "mere obstinacy." The second century critic Celsus thought Christians were simpletons and that Jesus was some sort of sorcerer. It is because of situations like these that men like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen and others argued for the veracity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Praise God for the faithfully orthodox.

But, even before them, the apostle Paul penned some of the most memorable and resolute words in all of Scripture: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). Paul knew something that Schleiermacher didn't. That only the absolute truth of the eternal and unchangeable God could change the subjective heart to see Him and the world as they really are. That reality is displayed in the gospel of Jesus Christ that comes to us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Demographers and news outlets are making a lot out of trends around Christianity right now. They are asking questions and writing thought pieces about the potential future of Christianity in America. For some, this is a period of massive interest in the Christian faith. For others, it's a time when record numbers of churches are closing their doors. I hope and pray for the former to win out. Perhaps it's the latter. But in many ways it makes little difference insofar as Christians

are people who are not ashamed of the gospel no matter what comes our way. We stand on the rock of Christ who bends history to his will.

G.K. Chesterton memorably quipped, "At least five times, the faith has to all appearances gone to the dogs. In each of these five cases, it was the dog that died." It is as Jesus said, "The gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). We don't choose the times in which we live, but we do choose how we respond to them. No matter the time period, we are salt and light. No matter the place, we proclaim the gospel. We belong to a sure and steadfast kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:27-29) and may that encourage us to hold fast to the truth once for all delivered to the saints.

There's no wisdom in denying the truths of God out of fear of our cultural moment or future. Countering Schleiermacher's error, men and women continue to write seriously and truthfully about God to this day. For the gospel is transformative and ever alive.

As we approach 2026 let us allow the Holy Scriptures to shape our imaginations. May the gospel of Jesus Christ anchor our souls and shape our desires so that we have eyes opened by the power of the Holy Spirit to see the world as it really is, and so to know the love of our Heavenly Father for all his children and the world he has made forever and ever. Amen.

Peace in Christ,
Will Stockdale