



Picture this scenario. A child loses something. They ask everyone in the house if they know where that thing is. No one seems to know. So, at some point during the day, mom searching for that long-lost and long-loved item. Of course, as she often does, she finds it. She gives it to the child and receives a “thank you.” Later in the day, dad asks the child, “Oh, is that thing still lost?” The child responds, “Oh, I found it.” Then mom chimes in, “Who found it?” “Oh, yeah, I mean, mom found it,” the child says.

Does that situation sound familiar? This hasn’t only happened with children. I’ve done it as well. Or, maybe this has happened on a bigger scale for you. You gave an idea to someone in the workplace, and instead of appreciating you and giving you the credit, they stole your idea and took it on themselves.

Now, let’s expand these scenarios. What if a child would not acknowledge that you found that thing and never said “thank you.” The child went on doing life their own way, not acknowledging you unless they felt the need for some additional help finding something they lost. Or, that co-worker never acknowledged you unless they wanted another idea. How is that child or co-worker living? Are they really appreciating you and valuing you? No. They’re valuing themselves. They’re seeking whatever makes much of themselves.

You know, this is how many professing Christians can live with God. At some point in time, they felt in need of God’s help. They cry out. They experience some type of relief, and then they don’t really talk to God or reach out to him unless they *feel* in need for something else. If that’s how you live, you’re not really living to make much of God. You’re living to make much of you. And, this is how many Corinthian Christians seemed to be living, according to 1 Corinthians.

We’ve been out of 1 Corinthians for three weeks. We barely had begun this series and then we were separated due to COVID concerns. Many of us have been stuck at home for weeks, learning new schedules, and 1 Corinthians has faded from your minds. What have we even discussed so far? Let me give you a brief background before moving forward. Paul begins this letter to the church in Corinth by reminding them of their calling. The Lord has rescued them from sin and given them forgiveness and eternal life: all of those who trusted Jesus! Then Paul encourages them to grow in the fellowship of the Son. This phrase emphasizes the unity they have around Jesus. Then Paul moves into talking about how he hears that there’s division amongst each other in the church. Paul’s wording up to this point has been leading to this issue. They’re unified in Jesus, but they’re not living like the unified family that they are in Christ. Instead of acting like brothers and sisters, they’re acting like the world that creates factions based on societal preferences.

Paul gives an example of how the divisions are beginning. Some say they’re of Paul or of Apollos or of Peter. Still others, who try to sound super-spiritual say they’re of Jesus. Is it wrong to have a favorite preacher? Not necessarily, but it is when it’s used to divide the church up. Some in the church were even using Jesus to divide the church! This is sinful. It’s living contrary to their calling.

It's here that Paul emphasizes the power and beauty and magnificence of the cross of Jesus. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, the Corinthians have come together as one family. But Paul goes on to say that the message of the cross, if truly understood, is considered foolish and unwise according to the world. By "the world," Paul is referring to everyone born in this world who does not look to Jesus alone for salvation. Because people aren't living by faith in him, that means their systems and beliefs will always find a way to contradict the gospel and look down on the message of the cross.

So, Paul states that since this is the case, why are the Corinthians going back to old ways of thinking and bringing them into the church? In the Greco-Roman world, their culture was notably stratified. You knew who the have's and have-not's were. You stayed in your position. And it seems some (or, many?) Corinthian Christians were trying to create that same mindset in the church. Yet, the gospel is utterly contradictory to that type of worldly logic.

Paul takes them back to the gospel. What seems to have happened in Corinth is that they, for a time, boasted in God's salvation in Jesus. And then, over time, they took God for granted. They started looking at themselves and began to boast in themselves. Kind of like a child or a co-worker taking credit for finding something. The Corinthians are modifying the Christian message, and we know that any tampering with that message actually changes the message completely. We are saved by grace *alone* through faith *alone* in Christ *alone*. If we're saved by grace through faith in Christ, and we contribute some to each, Christ is no longer the sole Savior and we boast some in ourselves. And, when we begin to boast in ourselves, Christ is defamed, division occurs and people are hurt.

This is the situation in Corinth. With this understanding, let's read from 1 Corinthians 1:26, and I'll read through 2:5:

*²⁶For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." **2** And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. ¹*

The main idea of this sermon is that **Our boast must be in the Lord and in his gospel**. Division within the church is symptom of misunderstanding and misapplying the gospel, which also means misunderstanding God – and as Paul words it in these verses, the divisions reveal we're not boasting in the Lord. Instead, we're boasting in ourselves. Sure, Jesus saved us, *but* I've got other ideas and preferences. What Corinth

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:26–2:5.

is doing is they're trying to hold on to Jesus with one hand and hold on to culture with another. But as Jesus taught, you cannot serve God *and* money. And that principle goes for everything else. You can't serve God *and* anything else. The Lord told us in Exodus 20 that we are to have no other gods before him and we are to worship nothing else but him. Therefore, our boast must be in the Lord and in his gospel. But what does this statement mean? Let's break it down today.

1. Our boast . . . (vv. 26-29)

Look at verse 29 again: so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.² Here's where the title of the sermon comes in. The title is "Don't Boast. Boast!" In verse 31, Paul will call us to a different type of boasting. But first, he wants us to see the foolishness of boasting in ourselves. The "so that" which begins verse 29 means that's the conclusion of an argument he's making. May no human being boast in the presence of God.

Think about that. Boasting in the presence of God is like going to Mount Everest and then doing everything to make yourself look good, take a selfie and then walk away – never even looking at Mount Everest, except through the lens of the camera. It's like one former pastor once said, we are a people who take a mirror to the Grand Canyon. We look at ourselves instead of bask in the awe of the Canyon.

If you truly were in the presence of Jesus, you'd find freedom in delighting in God – and this is what Paul wants from the Corinthians. This is what God calls us to as well! Do not boast in the presence of God. But I do want to add something about this word for "boast." While it does have the ideas that we understand behind this word, this word also carries with it the idea of trust. In boasting, we are expressing not only our delight, but also our trust. I think we can understand this concept. My in-laws own a place in Interlochen, Michigan. In the first few years of owning it, there were a lot of things that needed to be fixed and updated, and finding quality construction and maintenance workers was extremely difficult. But when certain people did jobs in a trustworthy way, that caused my in-laws to stick with those people. And, it's caused me to appreciate quality workers. So, when someone asks my opinion for a plumber or appliance repair or construction jobs, I can tend to "boast" in a sense. I share how they are trustworthy individuals and worth the money for their work.

On a greater level, Paul is using this word for boast regarding us. We as humans can go to Christ for forgiveness of sins and then we can resort right back to boasting in ourselves. With the divisions in Corinth and the divisions that can happen in any genuine church, what's happened is that we've begun to boast in ourselves and we are using worldly measurements for the boasting. Therefore, people can say, "Well, I'm a better Christian because I know how to articulate this doctrine," or, "I'm better than so-and-so because I have more education." Or, we can go the opposite, "They think they're so good. But really, I'm better because I have street smarts!" We often want to boast in ourselves. Scrolling through Facebook can be an endless covetousness and boasting fest. We see what others are doing and we say to ourselves, "Oh yeah, well. . . ." And we seek to boost our ego.

What is wrong with ourselves?! Is the point of life to boast in us? No. This boasting is not good. It reveals that we're clinging to our sinfulness again. We're staring at the mirror of ourselves instead of gazing at the glory of God's infinite majesty.

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:29.

Paul reveals how foolish this actually is in verses 26-28. So, let's read these verses again: ²⁶For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are. . .³

The word "for" in verse 26 connects back to what Paul has stated about the divisions and how the gospel is the priority. So, Paul calls them to "consider their calling." By the way, again Paul calls the Corinthians "brothers." Paul uses this term more percentage-wise in 1 Corinthians than any other book of the New Testament. That's a very important point to note because in a book where Paul is addressing division, he is continually reminding them that they are not divided in Christ and therefore must live like it. He won't let them forget this fact.

But what does it mean to consider their calling? The term calling refers to who they were when God forgave them of their sins and welcomed them into his family, giving them eternal life. I think at this point it's important for me to also call you to consider your calling. Think about who you were when God saved you. Why is Paul wanting them to do this? Because they're using worldly measurements for status within the church. They're doing what the Greco-Roman world did. The word for "wisdom" in this text actually refers to the type of wisdom of that day. It was what wisdom of sophists. They loved to speak in certain ways, with certain abilities. And so it didn't matter so much what you said, but how you said it. If you were convincing and gripping, you were worthy to be listened to.

Recently, I heard a pastor tell a story of how he visited a church once and one of his children was amazed at the preacher's speaking abilities. After the service was over, the child spoke to the pastor and said something like, "You sounded amazing in your sermon." At that, the preacher corrected the child and said, "It doesn't matter how it sounded if it's not true to the Word of God." In our day, we can be caught up in the same types of thing. How does it sound? I like the sound of this speaker over another speaker. But is that the point? Do we give status on the basis of these things? The wisdom of the world is empty. And so, in our culture, we can have a lot of technology or a lot of cool-sounding things. We can dress a certain way. None of that means we're godly. If we evaluate acceptance and "goodness" on this basis, we're forgetting the gospel.

So, consider your calling. Paul is talking specifically at Corinth. Not many in the church were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful or of noble birth. These three were often put together in the Roman world as the ultimate standards. You were wise, powerful and noble. These, in similar ways are the triad in our culture, too. You know stuff. You have a measure of authority by which people respect you, look up to you, love you. And while we don't have nobility, we can create things in our day that cause us to respect people more than others because of their birth. They're born in a certain family?! Or, they're born in a certain political party or they're born in a pastor's family. Whatever it is, we will boast in ourselves.

Yet, Paul says to the Corinthians, what did you boast in when you were saved? Could you boast in any of these things? No! And yet, God, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe; God, the Holy, Holy, Holy One; God, the One who made you and commands your allegiance; God, who deserves to be praised and yet you have defied him; God accepted you eternally not on the basis of any of these things. This is crazy according to worldly standards.

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:26–28.

The second century Greek opponent of Christianity, Celsus, once mockingly wrote this about Christians. He said: **Their [Christian's] injunctions are like this. "Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near. For these abilities are thought by us to be evils. But as for anyone ignorant, anyone stupid, anyone uneducated, anyone who is a child, let him come boldly." By the fact that they themselves admit that these people are worthy of their God, they show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonourable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and children**" (as quot. in Fee, p. 85). To this you might want to say, "How rude! That's not right. You're the idiot!" This is how people viewed Christianity – and still do today. But does Paul defend himself and seek to defend how amazing he is? No.

Paul goes on in verses 27-28 to say that God chose the weak, the foolish, the low and despised things of this world. By the way, Paul is describing the Corinthian Christians (and also us). In one sense, Paul is saying, "You're right! God chose the foolish. He chose the idiots! I am one of those! Amazing grace!" We are the weak, foolish, low and despised. Now, of course, Celsus is wrong that Christians don't want to grow in knowledge and wisdom. We don't want to be uneducated. But the message of the gospel is that we are accepted not on the basis of us whatsoever – and this is a foolish message to the world throughout all generations. Surely we have to wipe our shame away somehow, right? In an interview in 2014 with the former NYC Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, he said this: "I am telling you if there is a God, when I get to heaven I'm not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It's not even close." Before you get angry at him or judgmental over him, remember that if you have that attitude it's because you don't remember your sinfulness. Do you boast in your own faith in Jesus? Are you so amazing because you trusted in him? Ephesians 2 says that even that is not of yourselves, it is a gift of God. Our human tendency is to elevate us – to boast in and trust in ourselves. But salvation never came because of us. At our calling, we were weak, sinful, destitute – and yet God accepted us.

In God choosing this way of salvation, he shames the wise and the strong. Those who boast in their wisdom and strength. He also brings to nothing the things that are. This phrase "brings to nothing" is a term of judgment. In God saving people like us, he's revealing to the world our sinful boasting that will lead to destruction. How are people living – trusting in self or in God? If you trust in self, all you have is wisdom, power and the things this world offers. But all of that will fade away. Maybe you've even experienced the fading joys in these things. But God will never fade away. Therefore, Paul says "so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

Ventura, do you hear this? God doesn't accept you on the basis of any of these boasts. He accepted you on the basis of the glorious Savior because of the magnificent gospel. Remember your calling? You had nothing about which to boast in yourself, and God accepted you. Therefore, our boast must not be in ourselves. Instead,

2. Our boast must be in the Lord. (vv. 30-31).

Verses 30-31 say, "³⁰And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."⁴

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:30–31.

Our boast *must* be in the Lord. It's not just that our boat ought to be or should be, but as Christians our daily, hourly, moment-by-moment boast and trust *must* be in the Lord. Apart from faith, it is impossible to please him. God calls us to always live on the basis of his strength and provision – trusting him.

So, Paul says it's because of God the Father that you and I are in Christ Jesus. To be "in Christ Jesus" refers to our identity. Refers to our whole meaning of life. I heard a great illustration for this this past week. Imagine you wanted to travel to Australia. You go to the airport. You look at an airplane. You are amazed by how aerodynamic it is. And you just wish that someday you could be like that airplane so that you can fly. Until that day, you just yearn for Australia. Or, maybe you go to the airport and you try to follow the plane down the runway. Maybe if you try hard enough, you can pick up speed and follow in the air.

Silly illustrations, right? But the only way you are getting to Australia is by being *in* the plane. Not by imitating it or following it. You have to be in. This is what Paul's getting at when he uses the phrase "in Christ Jesus." Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah who God ordained to be the rescuer and bring the new creation! And if you have turn to Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing of your sinfulness and for reconciliation with God, you are *in Christ*. As a result, Paul says that Jesus has now become for us "wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification and redemption."

What do these words even mean? Well, where the world says we're foolish, we know otherwise. Jesus is God's wisdom. We are living *in* wisdom because we are *in* Christ. In knowing Jesus, we know the wisdom of God and as we read the Word, we see how Jesus is the foundation and fulfillment of Scripture. Whereas the Greco-Roman world of Corinth just liked talking about a lot of different concepts and were impressed with speaking styles because they really didn't believe in personal gods – we on the other hand know God himself! We are in Christ! And Christ has unlocked all the doors for true, eternal wisdom. Yes, it seems foolishness to the world, but it's reconciliation with God and growth in love for others!

Jesus has also become for us our righteousness. This is referring to our *justification*. The word "justify" means to be declared righteous. God declares us righteous not because we have fulfilled justice, but because Jesus has! On the cross, Jesus became our sin, your murder, my envy, your lust, my pride – and all our various ways we've defied God – and through faith, God gave us Jesus' righteousness as a gift. Therefore, we are in right standing with God. This means I have nothing to prove to God and I have nothing to prove to other people. People can judge me however they want, but God has accepted me. What a freeing reality. How many of you fear what others think of you? Why? Isn't that bowing to worldly standards? How are you dressed? How do you talk? How did you behave or perform? Is that where your right standing comes from? No, it comes from Jesus.

But you could say, that sounds great, but that sounds like I could be arrogant and just live in sin and say, "Well, I'm righteous!" But Paul goes on and says Jesus has become our sanctification and redemption. I think these two words go together here. This word for sanctification is referring to being set apart for holiness. Because Jesus' sacrifice was accepted by the Father, all who are in Christ are also at the Father's right hand. Being in Christ means we are *holy*. To be redeemed refers to us now not being slaves to sin. We're set free. So, if we're set apart as holy, redemption means we're set apart to also live holy and righteous lives.

By the way, in using these words, Paul is contradicting the worldly standards of Corinthian culture. To be wise, powerful and noble signified high acceptance and status. Paul says to be in Christ is true wisdom. To be in Christ is to be righteous. What can your strength do to make you right with God? What about

nobility? Can that make you set apart for holiness and live as such? No. It's not through boasting in you that you will be rescued. Only through Jesus.

As a result, Paul writes in verse 31, "as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." ⁵ Who's he quoting? Jeremiah, who quoted God in Jeremiah 9:23-24: ²³ **Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me. . ."** ⁶ Do you boast in yourself and in the impersonal things of this world? Or do you boast in the *personal God* who did *everything* to rescue a sinner like you and make you his delight?

If you boast in the Lord, it would make a difference even in how you treat fellow Christians, fellow members of our church family. Divisiveness would die because we would be humble in knowing our salvation came totally from God – not in or through us. Our boast must be in the Lord. But let's comment on the final phrase:

3. Our boast must be in the Lord and in his gospel (2:1-5).

Let's read verses 1-5 again from chapter 2: And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. ⁷

The Corinthians have forgotten their calling, but it seems as though Paul is also implying that they have forgotten the gospel power, too. Oh how quickly we can forget the gospel's power, can't we? Throughout Church History, the great distresses in the church has been because many Christians ran to the government for affirmation and for power. Even today, we can do that. We think that political change is salvation. Let me say this, *no political party* ever throughout any time period will change people's heart to love God and to genuinely love neighbor. No one. Yet, we can spin our wheels to make politics reign because it reigns in our hearts. Hold on. Who reigns? Jesus! And he reigns not through his assertion of taking power at his first coming, but through his death.

What about forgetting the gospel's power by looking at money and riches? So many believe the lie that riches make you accepted and fine. Money won't give you rest. It cannot save you from the grave and keep worms from eating your body in the grave. I know that's grotesque to think about, but I think we often fail to see the grotesque nature of our sinful propensity to prop up created things as gods. Money is a gift, but not God. What about power? We like to have power, and when we have power, we think that we don't need God. But who gave you that power? Who put you in that position? God! If you have been given authority, it's not because you *are* the authority. God is. So, authority is a gift. Government is a gift. Money is a gift. So many things in our lives are gifts. But none of them are gods!

Therefore, we should live with those gifts treating them as the gifts they are. How do we do that? How do we treat everything and everybody in a way that honors the Lord? By boasting in the Lord and in his gospel. Paul didn't come proclaiming the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. This refers to the

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:31.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Je 9:23–24.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 2:1–5.

type of speech of the day. He didn't come with the fancy type of verbiage that the sophists would have come with. Why? Verse 2 says that Paul decided to do something on purpose: He decided to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Does that mean Paul didn't want to know about any other things? Even in this letter, Paul talks about marriage issues and, of course, divisions and a good number of other topics. What does he mean to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified? He means that Jesus and the cross are the foundation to *everything* he does – which is a testimony to all Christians. Is Jesus and his death the foundation of everything you do? Is it the foundation of how you talk? Paul says that he was with them in weakness, in fear and much trembling. The phrase “fear and trembling” traces back into the Old Testament and often doesn't mean being afraid and trembling because of life circumstances, but it refers to a holy awe and reverence of God. So, I believe Paul's saying that he came to the Corinthians in his own weakness, but trusting in/boasting in the awesome God.

The Corinthians knew, as Paul spoke, that he wasn't emphasizing himself. He wasn't boasting in himself. He was making his boast in Jesus and in what the world would consider a foolish message about the cross-death that saves! His speech, therefore, was not done in ways that the world around him would approve. Yet, through the declaration of that message, the Corinthian church began. People actually believed the message. That shows that it was done in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. True power – not power like the world, but in the Spirit's power.

As a result, Paul states in verse 5, “⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”⁸ The gospel message reveals to us that our trust doesn't rest in the wisdom of this world. So, why keep going back to the world's wisdom? Why keep finding your acceptance in what people think of you? In status? In money? In power? In your abilities? Our faith rests in the power of God through Jesus and him crucified.

If we genuinely believed this message and continually meditate on it, our actions towards others and our speech would be transformed. Our hope would be bolstered. Our joy would increase. Oh how glorious our God. The wonderfully just, holy God who could have been done with this world instead sent his Son into the world to rescue sinners. **God could have divided from us. Instead he has called those who are sick and weak – not those who continue to think they're fine on their own. Because of God, we who trust in Christ are *in* Christ Jesus. So, don't boast. Boast! Let's remove divisiveness from our lives by meditating on our calling and the gospel. May our boast be in the Lord and in his gospel!**

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⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 2:4–5.