

Boast in Christ

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Preacher: Colin Horne

[0:00] This afternoon, we've asked our brother Colin Horn to bring us the Word of God.! And he's asked for us to read 1 Corinthians 1, 18-31.

So 1 Corinthians 1, 18-31. 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.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate. 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? 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.

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

[1:20] But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

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. 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.

He chose the lowly things of this world, and the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. 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. Therefore, as it is written, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. Amen.

[2:30] If you were to peek over the fence at my yard when I was a kid, you would have seen a rather strange sight. Half of the yard was normal grass. But the other half of the yard was just dirt.

Just dirt. And in that piece of dirt, there was dug this huge hole. When I say huge hole, I mean it was probably like five feet deep, and like 12 feet across.

Just this massive hole right there in the yard. And you probably would have scratched your head and said, what is that hole doing there? Why is there a hole in that yard? Well, my dad actually dug it.

My dad actually spent hours and hours digging this massive hole. And you probably would have thought, if you'd been peering over that fence, looking at him dig hours and hours on Saturday afternoons, you would have thought, what a fool.

Why is he wasting his time? What a pointless task. Who would spend their Saturdays just digging a hole in the ground? But to me, my dad was no fool.

[3:34] My dad was my hero, because he was digging me a fort. And it was the coolest fort ever. It had little cubby holes in it. There was even like a little passageway that you could crawl under.

I mean, this was the coolest fort. I cherished those times when my dad was digging that hole, and I was using this little tiny shovel to dig alongside of him, because those were some of the richest memories that I had.

But to the average onlooker, my dad looked like a fool. But to me, my dad was no fool. So appearances, they can be deceiving. Can they not? Without rightly seeing the whole picture of what my dad was doing, you would have really been able to draw some pretty inaccurate conclusions, both about him and about his character.

You would have thought, what a strange man. What a foolish man. Instead of commending my dad, you would have scoffed at him. And in the same way, when we don't fully grasp what God has done for us through his son, we scoff at the crucified Christ instead of commend him.

We make much of ourselves rather than of Jesus. We brag in ourselves rather than in Jesus. But when we see God in ourselves rightly, we boast in Jesus.

[4:48] When we see God and ourselves rightly, we boast in Jesus. So there's two questions that we need to answer when we've heard that.

The first is, what does it mean to see God rightly? What does that mean? What does it mean to see God rightly? And what does it mean to see ourselves rightly? And as we go through this passage of Scripture in 1 Corinthians today, you might actually think, I know this.

I know who God is. I know who I am. I've got that down. But let me tell you what, I was convicted as I was even studying this passage because if we see God rightly and we see ourselves rightly, we should boast in Jesus.

But I find that I often don't boast in Jesus. I boast in myself. And so, take to heart what we read and what we go over today because I think sometimes we can know in our minds who God is and who we are, but it hasn't sunk deeply into us.

And it's evidenced by who we boast in. Do we boast in Jesus or do we boast in ourselves? So to answer those questions, if you haven't already opened your Bibles, turn with me once more to 1 Corinthians.

[5:53] And we'll be in chapter 1 this afternoon. Now this section of Scripture is often used to encourage us as Christians. We read it and we take heart.

What's considered folly to the world is really the wisdom of God. But it's easy almost to boast in that. It's easy to think, oh, I figured it out. I have the right idea. But as we learned in Sunday school today, we have no room for boasting.

And so sometimes we think of this passage and we think of it as a source of encouragement, which it is in one sense. But within the context of 1 Corinthians here, Paul isn't necessarily writing to encourage the Corinthians as much as he is to correct them.

He's actually writing to correct them because there's divisions within the church. You see, Paul isn't pleased with the Corinthian believers because they've turned aside from boasting in God's wisdom. And they've begun boasting in their own wisdom. They've begun boasting in who they follow. Instead of saying, I follow Christ, they were saying, I follow Paul or I follow Cephas or I follow Apollos.

[6:55] And as a result, they were puffing themselves up. They were thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think. They were thinking, I'm really somebody because Paul is one awesome guy.

They were thinking, I'm really somebody because Apollos is one great speaker. And so Paul, he wants to address this. He wants to address the fact that they really thought that they were somebody based on the Christian leader they associated with.

Paul wanted them to see, he wanted them to realize that the Christian leaders they follow, they're not so glorious. They're mere men. He wanted them to stop boasting in who they follow because who they follow isn't as important and dignified as they really think.

Listen to what Paul says later in the letter. At one point he says, what then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each.

He says in another place, this is how you should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mystery of God. You see, Paul wanted to show the Corinthians that making much of their leaders was foolishness.

[8:03] It was folly because their leaders weren't all that the Corinthians were making them out to be. They were mere servants of God. They were simply doing their master's bidding and yet the Corinthians had elevated them and they had been distorted in their thinking.

They began to align themselves with these men and they were taking pride in the ones that they followed. They'd begun boasting in their association with these men when they should have been boasting in Christ.

And so you've got this camp over here of all those who follow Apollos and you've got a camp over here of all those who follow Paul and they were saying we're really somebody and they were then divided. They were in these factions because of who they associated with.

Each camp thought too highly of themselves because of who they followed. So Paul here in chapter one begins to address this issue. He sets out to show the Corinthians that they've misplaced their allegiance.

They've taken their sights off of Christ and shifted them to mere men. Men they admired for their great gifts of leadership. Men that they admired for their way with words.

[9:11] And they began to think highly of these men for their external qualities. They began to boast in these men for their surface level characteristics. They began to boast in these men and jealousy and strife then entered into the church.

Why? Because their boasting in men was really just a cover for boasting in themselves. Instead of being united in judgment and in mind the Corinthians were divided.

Instead of being united in their boasting in Jesus the Corinthians were boasting separately in themselves. They'd strayed from the truth. They'd failed to see God in themselves rightly.

And as a result they boasted not in Jesus but in themselves. So Paul addresses this wrong perspective of the Corinthians beginning here in verse 18 of this chapter.

He sets out to remind them of God's great wisdom in the cross and their great folly apart from the cross. God's great wisdom in the cross and their great folly apart from the cross.

[10:13] He wants to refocus their perspective. He wants to remind them of who God is and who they are. Because he wants them to boast in the Lord their crucified Savior. And so we come to this text today.

And my hope is that by the grace of God we too will be reminded of God's great wisdom in the cross and our great folly apart from the cross in order that we too might not boast in ourselves but boast in Jesus.

But to do this we must ask and the scriptures will answer two questions. Who is God and who am I? So let's turn now and read again these first few verses of 1 Corinthians.

We're going to start in verse 18. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

[11:27] For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom but we preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. But to those who are called both Jews and Greeks Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God for the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

So in the first eight verses here Paul answers the first question who is God? To see God rightly is to recognize that God is the all-wise orchestrator or director of salvation.

It's his plan it's his idea and it's a brilliant one. That's what we see here in verses 18 to 25. God is the one who is sovereignly carrying out his plan of redemption.

God is the all-wise orchestrator of salvation saving men by the power of the cross. Now we immediately see here in verse 18 that Paul is creating a contrast in this section.

He's contrasting the world's perception of the cross with the reality of the cross. The world thinks that the cross is foolishness but Paul says no, no the cross is the very means by which God powerfully saves.

[12:40] The world looks at God's plan of salvation and thinks it's ridiculous but Paul says no, no this is the very plan by which Christians are saved. What the world considers foolish Paul considers the wisdom of God.

Listen again to verse 21 where he says that it pleased God through the folly of what we preach. The unbelievers look at the gospel and consider it foolishness but then he goes on and says but this is what saves those who believe.

The Corinthians had fallen into a trap of worldly thinking. They had begun to measure wisdom by the world's standards. They were convinced that wisdom is that which is persuasive that wisdom is that which is moving it's what's powerful it's what's eloquent and so they were following these men who they thought to be wise.

Men that were great speakers like Apollos or men who carried great authority like Paul. They were following men based on standards for measuring wisdom that the world had set but Paul says well

that's a slippery slope and he reminds the believers that if they judge men by the world's standards of wisdom they must also judge the cross by the world's standards of wisdom.

And based on the world's standards the cross is folly. It's foolishness. The crucified Christ is a sham as far as the world is concerned. The man that Christians deemed to be their God and Savior he was executed like a common thief upon a cross.

[14 : 10] There's no wisdom in that. There's no power in that. Only foolishness says the world. What kind of a God would determine that to be the way that men are saved from their sins and reconciled to him?

Look at the unbelieving Jews. They certainly didn't think this could be God's means of salvation. Paul says that the cross was a stumbling block to them. You see they expected this triumphant king to come and to rescue them from their Roman oppression.

So when Jesus when he came into Jerusalem on a donkey the people thought him to be this victorious king returning from battle and they praised him saying Hosanna to the son of David blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord Hosanna in the highest because he seemed to fit the bill.

This was their triumphant king. He was entering into Jerusalem to vanquish their enemies but then only a week later these same crowds they were shouting crucify him crucify him.

Why? Because he didn't actually fit the bill that they were wanting. You see Jesus entered into Jerusalem but instead of cleansing the city of their Roman oppressors he cleansed the temple of professing Jews.

[15 : 21] Instead of going in and storming the governor's palace he sat in the temple and told parables. I mean this wasn't what the Jews expected right?

Think about his last night his enemies come and what does he tell Peter to do? He tells Peter to put away his sword and then he goes silent as a lamb to the cross. What kind of conquering king is that?

The Jews were asking. See the Jews they wanted signs they wanted wonders they wanted this glorious showing and Jesus just didn't give them what they wanted. The cross was a stumbling block to them because it didn't meet their expectations.

The response of the unbelieving Gentiles to the gospel is the same. Look again at verse 23 Paul says the cross was folly to them. They found it to be absurd. How could this Jesus be God?

God is transcendent. He's far above us. He's out of reach. He would never come to earth and walk as a man and he would never be put to shame let alone be put to shame in death.

[16 : 25] How could God die? A stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles. The power of God the wisdom of God disregarded by the world.

But is the cross thought of any differently today? Does our world look at the cross and praise God for his great power and wisdom? Does the cross evoke great reverence for God from the world? No. Quite the contrary. The world looks at the cross and scoffs at God. How archaic, they say, to believe such things. We've wised up. We're more enlightened than to believe that some wandering Jewish teacher holds the answers to our greatest problems.

We have science. We have technology. That's what answers our greatest problems. We live in the modern age. Don't you know the Bible is just a mythological book? Don't you know that it's just the product of religious evolution?

Don't be a fool and believe such nonsense, says the world. We're more civilized than that. The world's dismissed the cross and its power to save. The world has dismissed God as the all-wise orchestrator of salvation.

[17 : 33] And in a way, this rejection by the world, it reminds me of a scene from the book by Charles Dickens called A Christmas Carol. I think most of us know the story of that. The main character, Ebenezer Scrooge, at one point in the book, he sits down to have a bit of soup.

And as he's sitting there to have some soup, suddenly, one of his dear friends appears in the room. And that would seem normal except for the fact that Jacob Marley, his friend and business partner, has been dead for seven years.

And so, of course, Scrooge is shocked. He's in great dismay. He doesn't know what to do. And so he tries to explain away the appearance of Marley. He tries to rationalize what he's seeing.

He refuses to acknowledge that Marley is in the room. And listen to what he says. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of underdone potato.

And in the same way that Scrooge refused to acknowledge Marley, the world refuses to acknowledge God. The world dismisses him. The world seeks to explain him away as an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, an underdone potato.

[18:43] That's right. In the world's eyes, to trust in God, to trust in the cross, is to trust in a bit of cheese or a blot of mustard. Like Scrooge, the world exclaims humbug.

And because the world has such a low view of God, it boasts in itself instead of in God. So what about us? Are we any different from the world?

Do we see God as the all-wise orchestrator of salvation? Or like the Corinthians, do we need to be corrected by God? Do we need to be rebuked by God for thinking ourselves wise in this age? Have we substituted the wisdom of God for the wisdom of this world? Because when we think ourselves wise by the world's standards, we must then think little of God.

And when we think little of God, we boast in ourselves. The Corinthian believers, they had succumbed to the temptations of the world. What the world embraced as commendable, the Corinthians had embraced as commendable.

[19:47] For them, it was eloquent speech. It was wise words. It was great oratory skills, persuasive sayings. It was this external form of false wisdom.

And when the Corinthian believers bought into it, their view of God was diminished and they boasted in themselves. So what is it for us today? What does the world embrace as commendable that we, like the Corinthians, have also embraced as commendable?

Is it climbing the career ladder? Is it having the latest and the greatest piece of technology? Is it being this standout athlete? What is it that the world considers praiseworthy that you've bought into?

Or maybe, to put it another way, what do you boast in? Because if we boast in our job, then we've probably bought into the idea of climbing the career ladder. If we boast in our possessions, then we've probably bought into the world's idea of having the latest and the greatest.

If we boast in our great athletic ability and our achievements, then we've probably bought into the world's idea of being a great standout athlete. Whatever it is that we boast in, if it isn't Jesus, then it's folly, it's foolishness.

[21:02] What has caused you to think less of the cross? What has caused you to think less of God as the all-wise orchestrator of salvation? Because whatever it is that has demanded our affections is foolishness in the estimation of God.

It's a false hope. It's a false assurance. Whatever it is that has caused us to take our eyes off of God is meaningless in comparison to the cross. It's a striving after the wind. It's an empty endeavor. Whatever we consider to be impressive or noteworthy could never compare to God. For the foolishness of God, says Paul, is wiser than men. And the weakness of God, says Paul, is stronger than men.

So Paul has answered the first question for us. Who is God? God is the all-wise orchestrator of salvation. But to boast in Jesus, we need to not only think rightly about God, but we also must think rightly about ourselves.

We must answer the second question, then, who am I? So let's look at the last six verses of our passage to answer that question. Starting in verse 26.

[22:07] For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, so that as it is written, let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. To see ourselves rightly is to recognize that we are the weak, helpless recipients of salvation. To see ourselves rightly is to recognize that we are the weak, helpless recipients of salvation.

So Paul turns in his discussion from focusing more so upon God to focusing upon us. He's made it clear that it's foolish when we think little of God. And now he also makes it clear that it's foolish when we think much of ourselves.

[23:15] Paul calls the Corinthians here to inspect themselves. If they've been persuaded into thinking much of themselves according to the world's standards, then they've quickly forgotten their plight before their salvation.

In verse 26, Paul reminds them that they were not wise according to worldly standards. They were not powerful. They were not of noble birth. Yet God chose to save them that he might be seen as all the more powerful and all the more wise.

God chose them because they were foolish. God chose them because they were weak. God chose them because they were low and despised. And in so doing, he shamed the strong. He shamed the wise and he brought to nothing those who thought they were something.

And God has chosen us also because we had nothing to offer because we couldn't save ourselves. God chose us specifically because we couldn't boast in ourselves.

So why is it then that we fall into boasting once we've been saved? Why is it then that the Corinthians have fallen into boasting once they've been saved? We're like beggars who have been graciously invited into the banquet room of a king.

[24:24] And as we sit at the table enjoying his many blessings that he's given to us, we begin to think, I've really made a name for myself. I am really somebody. I mean, look at what I have.

All the while ignoring the king sitting at the head of the table. Why do we boast in such a foolish manner? Why do we boast as though we're something when we're nothing?

Because we so easily forget who we are apart from the transforming work of Jesus Christ. We forget that we were once beggars outside of the king's chambers. We were once, we treated garbage cans as dinner tables.

We treated the sewers as showers. We forget that we are the weak, helpless recipients of salvation. When we're persuaded into thinking like the world, into measuring ourselves up against the world's standards, we not only think less of God, but we inevitably think more of ourselves.

So we must be reminded both of who God is and who we are. God, he is the always king, and we are the weak, helpless beggars. He can't believe one to be true without the other.

[25:32] Both ideas are inseparably linked. We can't be mistaken on one account and correct on the other. We can't recognize God as the always orchestrator of salvation without also recognizing that we are the weak, helpless recipients of salvation.

We can't recognize God as the always king without recognizing that we are the weak, helpless beggars. They go hand in hand. When we fail to remember who God is and who we are, the result is that we boast in ourselves.

And when we do remember who God is and we do remember who we are, the result is that we boast in Jesus. We boast in Jesus because as Paul says in verse 30, he became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

We make much of Jesus because we owe all of our blessings, physical, spiritual alike, to him. Everything we have, we have in Christ.

What is folly to the world is our greatest treasure. Jesus Christ, scorned and despised by the world, he's cherished by us, he's adored by us because we rightly see who God is and we rightly see who we are.

[26:44] We rightly see God as the always orchestrator of salvation and we are the weak, helpless recipients. So then, boast in Jesus. You have a fantastic job, boast in Jesus.

You have material possessions, boast in Jesus. You have great athletic ability, boast in Jesus. You're in good health, boast in Jesus. You have a wonderful family, boast in Jesus. You make good grades in school, boast in Jesus.

There's no room for bragging about ourselves. Whatever we have, we have because of Jesus. There's no room for bragging on our accomplishments, no room for bragging in our abilities because we were nothing when God saved us.

In his wisdom, God saved the fools and God saved us by means of the cross. So boast in our crucified Savior. For at the cross, we are reminded of God's wisdom and man's, our folly.

We must view God rightly. To view him rightly, we must remember he is the always orchestrator of salvation. We must view ourselves rightly. And to view ourselves rightly, we must remember we are the weak, helpless recipients of salvation.

[27:48] Because when we view ourselves and we view God rightly, we boast in Jesus. It just flows out of us. We can't help but do it. It's just on our lips. We're filled with this awe and gratitude

for what God has done for us and we boast in him.

It just bursts from our lips. He saved me. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost. He saved me. And to him, the king of ages, immortal, wise, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come before you admitting that we boast in ourselves. God, we ask that you would change us and that you would cause us to see you rightly, not just in our minds or not just on paper, but in our hearts.

God, help us to see you rightly. Help us to see ourselves rightly that we would boast in your son.

We thank you for what he has done for us upon the cross. We could never repay the debt that we owe.

God, we are grateful for what he has done. We are grateful that you chose us, the fools, to show yourself all the more wise. And God, we pray now that we would go forth from here, living lives that would honor and glorify you, that would be filled with praise for you, that your name would be on our lips, that we might make you famous.

[29 : 09] It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.