

Boast in the Lord

1Cor 1.25-31

PRAYER

My wife has something the doctors describe as rotational scoliosis. Sounds pretty bad, but all it means is that her hips are twisted. And so the muscles in her back pull to one side more than the other. She has trouble sleeping at night. She can see the twist when she looks in the mirror. So she goes to a physical therapist who beats her up for an hour, pushing, yanking, and cajoling her hips into proper alignment so that her back muscles can loosen up. When she comes home and she looks in the mirror again, she can see the difference. On the other hand, she has to take two aspirins for the pain.

That's a lot like our Christian walk. We get out of alignment. We begin to pull more to one side than the other. We either lean too much on grace so that we don't do what we ought to do; or we lean too much on what we do, and forget the liberty and the peace of God's grace. Last week's message was painful – in retrospect, maybe more than it had to be. But before we can appreciate the blessing of grace, we have to admit our complete dependence on Christ, for life as well as salvation. But if we take that too far, we might conclude that there is *nothing* we can do about *anything*. How do we avoid that?

The Bible says that *whatever we do, we should do it heartily as to the Lord.* ^{Col 3.23} So when we sleep, we sleep to the Lord. When we eat, we eat to the Lord. When we speak, we speak to the Lord. And when we work, we work to the Lord. What does that look like? What makes that different than sleeping to get rest, eating to get nourishment, speaking to communicate, or working to earn a living?

Well, mostly it's an *attitude of the heart*. But it's also about BALANCE. We must never think too highly of ourselves, BUT we must never think too lowly of ourselves either. If we go too far one way, we think we're God's gift to mankind. And if we go too far the other way, we think we're worthless and so we lose hope. *We need to remember that we are God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved (Col 3:12^{NIV})* We were bought at a price (1Cor 6.20), and that's why we glorify God. We don't hang our heads in defeat and dejection, even when we wander, as we all do; that's because God's mercies are new every morning, and so is hope. If we *beat* ourselves up then, in a way, it denies the power and grace of God. And if we *puff* ourselves up, that also denies the power and grace of God. And so the struggle we have in our Christian walk is to keep our balance between the two.

Doing everything as to the Lord is a great way to maintain our balance. Then we don't have to go through the painful process of making corrections when our spiritual muscles pull us more one way than the other. Today we'll see how Paul encouraged that balance at Corinth. ***He reminds them that by the world's standards, they aren't much – even though they may think they are. And yet they are not insignificant either. God has chosen them to shame the world.*** How? God will display HIS wisdom and strength in THEIR weakness. And so, whatever they have, know, or accomplish, it is all of God. That's why they can *do it all heartily as TO the Lord*, because it is all **OF** the Lord. ***And so they can boast in Him.***

Please turn to 1Corinthians, chapter 1, verses 25-31. We'll finish up the chapter. We left off with verse 25. That verse draws a distinction between the wisdom and power of God, and the wisdom and power of men. If God were foolish and weak, ***and he is neither***, he would still be wiser and stronger than any man who ever lived. Why? Because He is their Creator, and they are mere creatures. Therefore, whatever wisdom men think they have to thwart the Gospel and the will of God, or whatever worldly ways by which men hope to save themselves, are doomed to failure. Why? Because God was pleased to use the foolish message of the cross to save men, or else they might think it was their own wisdom that saved them. God is wholly other, and he will not use the things of men to save men. That's why we must ***let go of those things***, and ***reach the end of ourselves***, so that the things of God become the only things that matter to us. The foolish gospel always wins

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Verse 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

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Paul will now repeat that same comparison. Only this time it is between the high and mighty MEN of the world, and the ordinariness of God's *messengers*. God will use WHAT men despise, and WHO men despise, to achieve what God intends, which is to call out of the world those he has given into the hands of Jesus Christ for redemption on the cross – which is all to God's glory because there is *nothing* of ourselves involved.

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²⁶ For consider your calling brethren, [i.e. look around you at those who have been called by God], that there were not many wise according to the flesh [by worldly standards], not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the **foolish things of the world** [that's us] to shame the *wise*, and God has chosen the **weak things of the world** [that's us again] to shame the things which are *strong*,

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²⁸ and God has chosen the **base** [or lowly] things of the world and the **despised**, the things that are **not** [i.e. not of the world], so that He may nullify the things that **are** [of the world], ²⁹ [And why has God done that?] so that no man may boast before God. [And here's the really good part] ³⁰ **But by HIS doing you are in Christ Jesus**, [it was all of God, and none of us] [Christ Jesus] became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

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³¹ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

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This passage is jam packed with tasty delights. But before we get to some of them, let's back up to thinking neither too highly nor too lowly of ourselves. We need to think of ourselves **with sober judgment**. (Rom 12.3) Paul describes these dearly loved brothers in a strange way. He says they are foolish, weak, common (or ordinary), and despised. Why you old smooth-talker you... Of course, he's talking about **how the world sees them – how it sees us**. And then he describes their counterparts in the world. He says they are wise, mighty, noble, and strong. Those are all the things we'd like to be called, aren't they? But those are all things **that belong to the world**. And believers don't belong to the world, do we?

Listen to Jesus' prayer to his Father, as he expresses his great desire for us:

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"I am no longer in the world; and **yet they themselves are in the world...** [that is, his followers] ¹⁴ "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because **they are not of the world**, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil **one**. ¹⁶ "**They are not of the world**, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. (Joh 17:11, 14-17 ^{NAU})

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God's truth, God's Word, that foolish message that he gave to us, sanctifies us while we are in the world. That means it sets us apart FROM the world, even as we live IN the world. God's Word removes from us our hunger for worldly things, and it creates in us a hunger for God's things. THAT'S how it sanctifies us. So we don't want to pursue wisdom, might, nobility, and strength FOR OUR OWN MERIT, FOR OUR OWN PRIDE. But **of themselves**, these are indeed things that we should desire – **it's just a matter of where we find them**. Remember, Paul is comparing the things of the world to the things of God, those who are NOT called to those who ARE called. Those who are NOT called choose to find all these things (wisdom, might, nobility, and strength) IN THE WORLD. They define these

things for themselves, and then they try to lure us into defining them the same way. Like David and his men, we sometimes exile ourselves from the Promised Land, and go to live among the Philistines. We try to look like we're one of them.

But we're not. We are CALLED by God, to live in the kingdom, even while we are IN the world; and THAT is how we can be IN the world, without being OF the world. *Our tastes, our hunger, our desires are for the things of God.*

So when we pursue wisdom, it is the Wisdom of God, the *speech and the knowledge of Jesus Christ*. And when we pursue might, it is the might of God, and *the power of His Spirit* at work in us. And when we pursue nobility, it comes from the *nobility of Christ* – that we are heirs and co-heirs with him in the kingdom of God, and not in an earthly kingdom. (Rom 8.17; John 18.36) And when we pursue strength, it is the strength which comes from *FAITH in Jesus Christ* and the sure knowledge of *God's Redemptive Plan* – **the foolish message**. NONE of this is our own. It *all* comes from God.

And yet what comes from God is truly ours. We are not *wise* in ourselves, but in Christ lives all the wisdom and knowledge of God (Col 2.3); and we are IN Christ, united to him. We are not *mighty* in ourselves, but the Spirit of Christ is mighty in us (2Cor 13.3), with the same might that raised him from the dead (Rom 8.11; Phil 3.10). We are not *noble* because of our own name or earthly holdings, but because of the name which is above all names (Eph 1.21; Phil 2.9), **Jesus** our Lord and Savior. We are not *strong* in ourselves, but *we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us* (Phil 4.13).

And so, there is nothing of our own to brag about. Yet, because of **Christ** we can boast about the things of God, and the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. When the foolish people of God, preach the foolish message of God, a funny thing happens to display God's wisdom and power. Verse 27 says that we SHAME the things of this world with the things of God. Well, not us personally. It's the comparison of the two that shames the things of the world. We don't mock and taunt, and try to compare ourselves to those who are both in and of the world. We're not better than them. We're really not so very different than them in our fleshly desires. What distinguishes us is what God has done FOR us and IN us by his grace.

Again, think neither too highly nor too lowly of yourself, but consider yourself with sober judgment. What do we have that God did not give us? We are broken vessels, mere clay. All mankind is made from the same lump; then God chooses what to do with us. Whatever effects our own sin may have had on us, God can

intercede and overrule those effects. He transforms us, changing our common purposes into noble purposes, bringing glory to Himself because HE has done it.

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Rom 9:21-26 ^{NIV} Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? ²² What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – ²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

The shame is NOT in the comparison that WE make, but in the comparison that GOD makes, which is for his glory alone. Our mere identity as the children of God is enough to shame the things of this world. The word for shame in Greek carries with it all the same connotations we have in English – *painful humiliation and conscious disgrace*. But the comparison is NOT NOW, NOT HERE, and NOT BY US. It must await Judgment Day, when Christ separates the sheep from the goats.

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³² "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; ³³ and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (Mat 25:32-34 NAU)

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God has appointed that day for this very purpose of shaming the things of men, and to display his grace and his glory *in us*. Our inheritance is no longer sin and death from Adam, but righteousness and life from Christ, received by God's grace alone; *nothing we have done will deserve or merit it, nothing in ourselves, but only because of Christ*. And so every knee shall bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2.10-11). The corrupt things of men and of the world will be put to shame by what God has done. **By His grace**, we will inherit the kingdom of Christ, instead of death and destruction. *No eye has seen, no ear has heard, what God has prepared for those who wait for Him. Isa 64.4.*

Why was an inheritance prepared for us from the foundation of the world? God *decreed* it. How much did we contribute to it? *Nothing*. Even on Judgment Day, what will separate those of us who are called to be the people of God, from those who were not called? The answer is **Jesus Christ, by the decree of God**.

Verse 30 **But by HIS doing you are in Christ Jesus,**

It is by GOD'S doing, not our own, that we ARE found in Christ Jesus; notice it's *present tense*. God has chosen us for this purpose. Unlike shame, which is future, our election in Christ is past tense. It will be **revealed** on Judgment Day; it doesn't **happen** on that day. How and when did God unite us to Jesus so that we are now IN Christ Jesus? This is one of the most profound truths in all of Scripture.

Please turn to Ephesians 1:4-11. I'll be reading from the NLT. This is an informal translation, but I think it captures the flavor of this passage nicely.

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⁴ Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. ⁶ So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. ⁷ He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.

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⁸ He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹ God has now revealed to us his mysterious plan regarding Christ, a plan to fulfill his own good pleasure. ¹⁰ And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ – everything in heaven and on earth. ¹¹ Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

This work of God is what verse 30 in Corinthians 1st chapter is referring to. By God's doing you are in Christ Jesus. And being in Christ Jesus, certain things flow from that. **By faith**, believers are now holy and blameless before God, NOT because of anything we have done, but only because of what Christ has done. And so, being IN Christ, WE are holy and blameless before God, because Christ is holy and blameless. His righteousness is *imputed* to us, it is considered to be our righteousness, because we are in Christ. Eph 1.7 says that through Christ's blood, and BY God's grace, we have forgiveness of sin.

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ON THE CROSS the mystery of God's will has been revealed. And so the message of the cross, *which is the Gospel*, is the **mystery** that has now been made known. That was God's intended purpose in sending Christ to the cross. And so we were chosen in Christ before the foundations of the earth, but we were united to him IN FACT, IN REALITY – when we confessed our faith in Christ.

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(Eph 2:8-9 ^{ESV}) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, [Why not?] *so that no one may boast.*

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It was foreordained by God. And then God's Spirit, working in us to draw us to Christ, brought it into being. This is no different than what we see in Genesis when God's Spirit hovered over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." What God ordained in eternity, became a reality in time and space. But for us, there was a time when we were dead, and separated from God. And then we were made alive in Christ, and reconciled to our heavenly Father by faith in Christ. We were made one with Christ. *We once were lost, but now we're found.*

Look again at 1st Corinthians, VERSE 30.

SLIDE

But by HIS doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

Christ Jesus *became* to us – what an interesting way to put it! He's not someone separate from us, that we go to occasionally, like checking out a book from the library. We are IN Christ. *He is our Head.* He is wisdom *personified* and we are immersed in him, living and breathing in him, and we cannot be separated either from his love or from his very being. *In him we live and move and have our being.* (Acts 17.28) Look back to verse 24. "But to those who are called, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God." It hints that those who are *called, are IN Christ*, just as we see here in verse 30. Theologians call this the *Mystical Union*, but don't slip into mysticism. We don't merge into the Ground of All Being. *God considers us one with Christ, just as he considers us righteous because of Christ.* We are so identified with Christ, and he is so identified with us as his body, that there is no legal distinction to be made. God sees us *in Christ*. And *in Christ* is found the power and wisdom of God. Again, this power and wisdom is not *separate* from Christ, as if they were something he possessed – they ARE Christ, and Christ IS these things; and WE are IN Christ; and so all the power and wisdom of God are always available to us, because we cannot be separated from Christ.

And now in verse 30, this idea of identity with Christ is taken further. It isn't that righteousness and sanctification and redemption are separate from Christ, or outside of Christ, and that he somehow makes them available to us. Rather *righteousness* (which is having a right standing with God), and *sanctification* (which is being holy in God's sight), and *redemption* (which is having all our sins paid for) are found IN Christ. He IS these things. They may be found *only* in him.

That's why Jesus is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life, and why no one comes to the Father but by him. (John 14.6) And therefore we must be *found in him*, or else we *cannot* have righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Christ has *become* these things to us. That's extraordinary! The purpose of the Gospel is to ensure that you WILL be found in Christ on that Day! It calls you to him to be united to him by faith, so that all that is IN Christ, **salvation itself**, is *yours*.

And so Paul writes to the church at Philippi: (Phi 3:8-11 ^{ESV})

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⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. [Paul has *reached the end of himself*; he considers every worldly thing trash; he values only the things of God.] For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹

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and be found in him – and be found in him – not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith – ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that *by any means possible* I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

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And now, for all these reasons, Paul writes in 1Cor 1.31: ³¹ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

Just as it is written, just as God has recorded it for our understanding and wisdom. Paul is quoting from Jeremiah, chapter 9, verses 23 and 24. This is a wonderful passage, and it wraps up everything that Paul has been saying to the Church in this first chapter. This is how it reads.:

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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*, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. *For in these things I delight*, declares the LORD." ^{ESV}

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God *practices* steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. He *delights* in these things. And here we come full circle. Because we are in Christ, and we are ONE with him, and because Christ is ONE with the Father, Christ IS steadfast love; he IS justice; he IS our righteousness in the earth. He practiced these things when he walked upon the earth. They are his attributes as the Son of God.

And because WE *ordinary* people are IN Christ, and because CHRIST is IN us, these are *our* attributes, and *our* practices, and what *we* delight in. Even so, the steadfast love is not ours; it is Christ's. And the justice is not ours; it is Christ's. And the righteousness is not ours; it is Christ's. ***He puts to shame the things of the world, and makes nothing of them, by displaying God's grace in ordinary people like us, people that the world discounts.*** GOD does not discount us. He *loves* us.

THAT'S how we maintain our balance between grace and duty, between not thinking either too highly or too lowly of ourselves. Whatever we might have to boast in, we boast IN THE LORD, for *his* glory, because it is ALL of God.

PRAYER