



1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 1C

Chapter 1:25-31

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- We love to compare ourselves to others
 - We're trained to compete in school and in our workplace
 - We take tests, we achieve class rank
 - We are graded at work
 - We keep score in contests and sports
 - We're programmed to think in terms of comparisons
 - Unfortunately, we always find someone who is better than we are
 - Someone smarter, richer, better looking
 - Someone bigger, faster, stronger
 - Someone more capable in whatever measure we choose to make
 - But fortunately for our egos, there is usually also someone in the crowd who is less than we are in some measure
 - Someone less wise, someone less capable, less attractive
 - It's these people that make us feel better about ourselves
 - Of course, we know in our heart that such comparisons are vain and meaningless, especially from an eternal perspective
 - So it is with man
- But the vanity and pride of mankind isn't content in making comparisons to other men...we also make comparisons with God
 - Fallen man tries to compete with God, both in power and wisdom
 - We create rules for ourselves for Who God is, what He can do and how He thinks
 - We define what He wants and how we may please Him
 - And such wisdom is utterly bankrupt in the face of a living God Who will not be defined by His creation
 - And this tendency is not limited to fallen, unbelieving men and women
 - Immature believers have a tendency to do the same thing
 - And this is what Paul is facing with the immature church in Corinth
 - They were too busy slapping each other on the back for having followed the "right" evangelist to notice God really did the work of salvation
- But Greek society loved to measure wisdom and make comparisons between people
 - And because they didn't understand how they came to faith, they began making distinctions and comparisons among themselves on the basis of who delivered them the Gospel
 - Talk about the most inappropriate of comparisons!
 - Those who were "of Paul" thought they were better than those who were "of Apollos" – and vice versa
 - So not only had they misunderstood how they came to faith, they had also made it a point of prideful comparison

- They wanted to find that person they could compare themselves with to boost their ego
- And as I said, if we're looking for someone less capable with which to compare ourselves, we will always find them

When my wife and I arrived at an automobile dealership to pick up our car, we were told the keys had been locked in it. We went to the service department and found a mechanic working feverishly to unlock the driver's side door. As I watched from the passenger side, I instinctively tried the door handle and discovered that it was unlocked. "Hey," I announced to the technician, "it's open!" To which he replied, "I know – I already got that side."

- We start again in v.25, as we transition to the next point in Paul's letter

1Cor. 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

- This verse opens with the Greek word *hoti*, which is translated "because"
 - In the earlier verses Paul said he was called to preach a foolish-sounding message
 - He preached the word of the cross, which God designed to be a message rejected by men seeking truth in their own power
 - Their so-called wisdom would lead them away from the truth
 - Still, Paul didn't try to enhance that foolish message with clever human words of wisdom
 - And now Paul explains why he followed that method
 - Because God's foolishness is more effective, more powerful
 - Relying on the "foolishness" of God was far better than taking his chances with the wisdom of men
 - Obviously, Paul is speaking sarcastically, since nothing of God is foolish in reality
 - But from a man's perspective, Paul says even when God's ideas seem foolish, they are still infinitely more wise and powerful than anything man comes up with on his best day
 - So Paul wasn't going to trade God's ways for man's ways
 - And neither should we
- But God's plan to mock the wisdom of men goes even deeper
 - Not only was the *message* of the Gospel judged foolish according to man's standards, so was the *audience* who received that truth
 - Ironically, the people of Corinth were judging themselves favorably for having come to faith under Paul or Apollos
 - They were making the prideful comparisons common in Greek society

- But they had conveniently overlooked an important detail in God's working
- So Paul points it out to them

1Cor. 1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

1Cor. 1:27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

1Cor. 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

- Paul asks the believers in Corinth to “consider your calling...”
 - The Greek word for consider means to reflect, to take a closer look at something
 - Paul says, take a second look at your calling
 - More specifically, take note of who God has called in His Church
 - Paul describes them in three ways
 - Not many were wise
 - Not many were mighty
 - Not many were noble
 - We don't know much about the demographic make up of the members of the Corinthian church, except Paul's own testimony
 - But as a major Greek city, we can be sure Corinth had its share of philosophers and wise men
 - And the city was a relatively prosperous commercial center in its day, so wealthy men must have been plentiful
 - And as a center for Greek worship, Corinth no doubt had a privileged class of rulers, priests, etc.
- But Paul says that the church in Corinth was not populated by many of these classes
 - These groups were underrepresented in the church in Corinth
 - It's important to note that Paul says there weren't “many” of these in the church
 - He didn't say there were none
 - Paul didn't say certain types are *excluded* from God's plan
 - All people are included to some degree, because God is not a respecter of persons, as Paul writes in Romans 2:11
 - But Paul says few elite members of Greek society have been called by the Spirit to become part of the church in Corinth
 - Consider the irony...the church has been arguing among itself working to establish some measure of status and privilege
 - Some seek to gain some advantage over others by claiming to be “of Paul”

- Then another would argue they deserved the greater status because he was “of Apollos”
 - Then Paul points out they were nothing special according to the world’s standards
- It’s like two 90 year-old men living in the retirement home arguing about who was a more eligible bachelor
 - The two men might find some basis on which to settle the argument
 - Meanwhile the world would rank these guys at the very bottom of any list of eligible bachelors
 - So it was in Corinth...men and women contending for status within the church, yet forgetting that they were fighting over the scraps of Corinthian society
- In v.27 Paul says that the Lord specifically chose certain people to be included in the Church
 - The Lord chose those who were not wise, not strong and not noble
 - And He did so to mock human thinking and pride
 - The wise, strong and privileged congratulate themselves on their accomplishments
 - They invent their own gods, make their own rules and live oblivious to their coming judgment
 - So the Lord mocks their self-importance by extending His grace to the weak and worthless (according to the world’s standards)
 - Just as the Lord authored the Gospel in a way that mocks the wisdom of men, so He also works to build His church in such a way as to mock the pride of men
 - The Lord has always worked this way
 - We remember from our Genesis study the many times we watched God working to choose one man over another
 - As when He chose Isaac over Ishmael
 - Jacob over Esau
 - Joseph over his brothers
 - Elsewhere in the Old Testament, He selects David over his brothers
 - He selects the fishermen and tax collectors as apostles
 - Even Jesus Himself was a lowly carpenter from Nazareth, a town so lowly that people wondered if anything good could come from there
 - God has always been in the business of selecting the one no one expected
 - And as He works to build His Church, He’s doing exactly the same thing
- Earlier Paul taught how we make the Gospel void when we substitute the wisdom or power of men
 - And when we claim that our place in the church is a matter of individual merit, we make the grace of God void
 - We are undermining God’s purpose in bringing the Church into existence in

the first place

- One of the reasons the Gentile church has been given a place in God's plan is to mock the so-called wisdom of Israel
- Moses told the people that God would do this in response to Israel's unbelief

Deut. 32:20 “Then He said, ‘I will hide My face from them,
I will see what their end shall be;
For they are a perverse generation,
Sons in whom is no faithfulness.

Deut. 32:21 ‘They have made Me jealous with what is not God;
They have provoked Me to anger with their idols.
So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people;
I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,

- The Lord speaking through Moses told Israel that a day would come when the Lord would hide His face from Israel
 - He would make the nation jealous in a sense by forming a relationship with another people, the Gentiles
 - And notice the Lord calls these Gentile people a foolish nation
- The Lord's point is that He will teach Israel a lesson by bringing those least likely to know the God of Israel – the Gentile nations – to faith
 - While passing over God's own people, the Jewish nation, for a time
 - Now consider how we are working against the Lord's purposes when we try to make ourselves look worthy or deserving of his grace
 - When we claim status or worth in the face of salvation, we deny the obvious, like the old men in the retirement home
 - There is nothing special or deserving in any of us
 - We deserve to be counted among that “foolish nation”
- Instead of allowing our pride to carry us away into comparisons and status seeking of one kind or another, we're supposed to carry ourselves in humility
 - And when we feel the need to boast, we are to consider carefully what we will boast about
 - We don't boast of what we did to contribute to our success or status in the church
 - We boast of our limitations and weaknesses, as Paul did

2Cor. 12:9 And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

2Cor. 12:10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

- Since we know the Lord has chosen a foolish people to shame Israel and a weak people to shame the power of the world, then let's boast about God's plan
 - Boast how incapable you are and unprepared and unqualified
 - If you have to brag, brag about how much God had to do in compensating for your weaknesses
 - Talk about how little you could achieve apart from Christ working in you
 - Then at least your bragging is working in the right direction, furthering the work of God in the Church
 - Rather than working against the Lord
- Paul tells the Corinthian church the same thing at the end of Chapter 1

1Cor. 1:29 so that no man may boast before God.

- The Lord is working His plan to silence the boasting of men, especially concerning His plan of redemption
 - No man will stand before the Lord on the day of his judgment and claim any part in his own salvation
 - We didn't examine the cosmos, uncover the truth of God, deduce the Gospel message and embrace it in our own power
 - The message was too foolish, too unattractive
 - Because God designed it to be compelling only by His power
 - And even after the message has come to rest in our hearts, we can't engage in a little re-writing of history by claiming we are "of Paul" or "of Steve" or anyone
 - We didn't deserve our spot much less earn it
 - We were not a choice prospect for God...we were anything but
 - According to Paul, the Lord went out of His way to stack His team with the last string
 - If salvation was a kickball game, God picked last, and He chose us
 - If the church was a prom, we're the date with a "good personality"
- So if the message of the Gospel is designed to be rejected apart from the power of God...
 - And those who received that power were specifically selected by God to make a point to the world...
 - Then what does that say about how we became believers in the first place?
 - Paul gives us the unavoidable conclusion

**1Cor. 1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,
1Cor. 1:31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."**

- By His doing, we are in Christ Jesus
 - We should take a closer look at that statement, starting with the end first
 - We are “in Christ Jesus” Paul says
 - To be “in” Christ is a uniquely Pauline phrase
 - He uses it no fewer than 83 times in his letters
 - It simply means those who are in the grace of Christ, believers in Christ by faith in the Gospel
 - Paul preferred the term “in” as opposed to “of” because it reflects our position of righteousness
 - And it suggests our security
 - Just as the family of Noah entered into the ark, which pictures Christ
 - So are we “in” the Lord by faith, sealed until the day of our redemption
 - So Paul says we are in Christ and find ourselves there by His doing
 - This is the unavoidable conclusion we come to as a result of everything else Paul presents in Chapter 1
 - Nothing explains why we are “in” Christ
 - We didn’t reason our way into the relationship
 - We didn’t apply for membership
 - We didn’t deserve it on the basis of personal merit
 - And the purposes God set forth in creating the Church were established long before we were born
 - God was at work to bring us into the body of Christ long before we had anything to say in the matter
- Paul’s statement is an expression of the doctrine of election
 - Election is the truth of how the Lord elects (or chooses) to extend His grace to some according to His sovereign will and eternal purposes
 - Those He elects to receive His grace come to Him, drawn by the Spirit, and are saved through faith
 - Scripture uses the word “elect” because even though the message of the Gospel goes out into the world, God does not draw everyone
 - As Jesus said, many are called but few are chosen
 - Paul doesn’t teach the doctrine in this passage – he leaves that to others places, particularly Romans 9
 - But the reality of election is clearly evident in Paul’s teaching in this chapter
 - In fact, without appreciation for the truth of election, this chapter makes no sense whatsoever
 - Paul’s entire argument to the church in Corinth was that they had no basis for boasting how they came into the faith
 - Paul supports his argument by explaining that they didn’t choose God, He chose them

- In fact, the Gospel was designed to prevent them from accepting it apart from God's electing power
- And when they stood back and considered that calling, they could see the hand of God working to select only the wise, weak and lowly
- These arguments only make sense in light of the doctrine of election
 - We are "in Christ" because of the Lord Himself
 - And by God's hand, Christ and the message of the Gospel became wisdom to us
 - By the renewing of our minds through the Spirit, we gained the capacity to see the truth of the Gospel
 - And in like manner, Paul says Christ is the source of our righteousness
 - We can eagerly look forward to our judgment day because we know we will not be judged according to our righteousness
 - We will be judged according to Christ's righteousness, which has been given to us by faith
 - Moreover, Christ is the source of our sanctification
 - In this context, Paul is speaking of our future sanctification when we receive our new bodies and are glorified
 - Our opportunity to live in glory one day comes from Christ, who will give to us a new, holy body
 - Finally, Christ is our redemption
 - Our assurance that we have conquered the enemy and death is made possible by the payment of Christ
 - Having made the payment, we can be assured that the Lord will share His inheritance with us
- So if we're going to boast about our position in Christ, the only thing we can boast about is the work of the Lord...nothing less, nothing more.