

# 1 Corinthians Lesson 9

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

## INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

The previous lesson set out the heart of this greater section. In 1:18-25 God, through Paul, exposed the world's entire framework of wisdom, set it aside, and put His own wisdom and power in its place, both revealed in the crucified Christ. Two threads were drawn from that paragraph and kept in view. The first is that the power of the gospel is δύνάμις *dunamis*, ability, an ability that belongs to God and that He has invested in His word, whose sharpest expression is the message of the cross. The second is the identity thread: one settled people named three ways, those who are being saved (verse 18), those who believe (verse 21), and the called (verse 24), standing over against the one class of those who are perishing. Across this section the wisdom of God carried two senses, His transcendent wisdom in verse 21 and the crucified Christ Himself in verse 24.

We finished last week by weighing what that paragraph was and was not doing. From verse 18 through verse 25 the weight fell almost entirely on the *is*, the doctrine of the cross as God's wisdom and power. The "ought" is not yet discussed until the verses now before us, where the lens turns from the world in general to the Corinthians in particular and the whole argument is driven home to its purpose. The abstract claim of verses 18-25 becomes personal evidence here. Having declared that God makes the world's wisdom foolish, the text now points to the Corinthians themselves: look at yourselves; you are the proof. And here at last the application lands, in two boasts, the one forbidden and the one commanded.

## THE HORTATORY SHIFT

Through verse 25, the argument concerned humanity at large: the wise, the scribe, the debater, Jew and Greek, the world and its wisdom. At verse 26, the lens narrows to a single congregation—consider your calling, brethren. The doctrine has not changed, but its target has. What God did to the world's wisdom in principle He did to these particular people in fact. The church at Corinth is God's own demonstration of the argument, assembled and seated in one room. The point is not proved with a syllogism but with a roll call: look around at whom God called. The evidence is the congregation itself.

This is where the identity thread from the last lesson bears fruit. The word *calling* in verse 26 is κλήσις *klēsis*, the noun standing behind κλητός *klētos*, the called, the third name in the thread from verse 24 and the settled identity established at the opening of the letter, where the gospel is God's call and all who receive it are the called. The called are now summoned to consider their call, and the considering exposes something about its design: the call was so arranged that no one it reaches could ever boast of having earned it.

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## BOASTING

Verse 29: so that no man may boast before God. Verse 31: let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. Everything in this section explains why human boasting is excluded and where the only legitimate boasting is found. The paragraph runs as a single argument about boasting, and its halves answer each other: the boast that is forbidden (any boast before God, any boast in the flesh) and the boast that is commanded (boasting in the Lord.)

God's wisdom is not something human wisdom will reach. The wisdom of God is that salvation would come by grace and not by achievement, and that revelation was clearing the ground so that no one could boast in themselves. Verse 29 states that purpose outright. And it falls directly on the problem that opened the letter. The factions of 1:10-17 (I am of Paul, I am of Apollos) were boasting in men. The cure is not a better-managed boast in better men; it is the removal of every boast in the flesh and its replacement by one boast alone, in the Lord. When boasting in the flesh dies, the premise of the false worldview dies with it.

## EXPOSITION

### Verse 26: Consider Your Calling

The verse opens with an imperative, *consider*, βλέπω blepō, to look at, to take note of. This adds no new information so much as it directs attention to what the Corinthians already are. The call in view is the gospel call traced from the first verses of the letter, and it is used here to point at the people the call gathered and the condition they were in when it reached them.

That condition is unimpressive by every measure the world keeps. There were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. Three categories, and they are not random. They are the very things Corinth prized and the very things this section has been dismantling. *Wise*, σοφός sophos, the wisdom word again, now applied to persons, the intellectually distinguished. *Mighty*, δυνατός dunatos, from the same root as the δύναμις dunamis of verse 18, the powerful and influential, those who could get things done. *Noble*, εὐγενής eugenēs, the well-born, those of high birth and social standing. Wisdom, power, and status, the currency of the age.

The wording is precise: "not many," not "not any." The gospel did reach some of standing, e.g. Crispus, ruler of the synagogue (Acts 18:8) and Erastus, the city treasurer (Romans 16:23). God does not refuse to call the wise or the well-placed, but He does not build His church on them or from them as a class. The composition of the called is lopsided because those who are wise, strong, and well-born do not typically think they need a savior. The qualifier on the first term carries weight too: wise according to the flesh, κατά kata σάρξ sarx. There is a wisdom measured by the

flesh, by the world's standard, and it is precisely that measure the text has already set aside. The flesh, σὰρξ sarx, returns in verse 29 as the thing that cannot boast.

### Verses 27-28: God's Deliberate Choosing

If verse 26 describes the composition of the church, verses 27-28 account for it. It was no accident and no failure of the gospel to attract better material. It was God's choice, stated three times so the agent cannot be missed: God has chosen, God has chosen, God has chosen. The verb is ἐκλέγομαι eklegomai, to choose out, to select for oneself, standing in the middle voice: God chose, and chose for His own purpose. The threefold repetition drives home whose act this is. The wisdom of God would appear to be moronic, weak, and base and despised. Those who believe it and adopt God's wisdom will be classified the same way by the world.

What God selects is, in each case, what the world discards. He chose the foolish things of the world, μωρός mōros, the same root as the foolishness of the cross in verse 18, to shame the wise. He chose the weak things, ἀσθενής asthenēs, the same root as the weakness of God in verse 25, to shame the things that are strong. He chose the base things, ἀγενής agenēs, and here the wordcraft shows: ἀγενής agenēs is the exact negation of εὐγενής eugenēs, the noble of verse 26. To these are added the despised, ἐξουθενέω exoutheneō, the utterly disregarded, counted as nothing, and then, most startling of all, the things that are not, μή mē εἰμί eimi, the nonentities, the things the world files under does-not-exist.

The purpose in each case is a reversal. God chose the foolish to shame the wise; the weak to shame the strong; and the nothings so that He may nullify the things that are. That verb is strong: not only to embarrass the somethings but to render them inoperative, to strip them of standing and effect. The world's entire scale of value is overturned by the people that associate with God's wisdom. He takes what the world rates at zero and uses it to cancel what the world rates at everything. The cross was the principle; the church is the principle enacted.

### Verse 29: So That No Flesh May Boast

Beneath the reversals lies a single purpose—so that no man may boast before God; literally, so that not all flesh, πᾶς pas σὰρξ sarx, may boast in the presence of God, a Hebrew way of saying no flesh at all. The word *flesh* reaches back to verse 26, where there were not many wise according to the flesh; here it is precisely the flesh that is barred from boasting.

*Boast* is καυχάομαι kauchaomai, to glory, to take one's stand, pride, self-worth in something. The whole paragraph builds to this negative purpose. God's salvation foolishness to bypass human wisdom (verse 21) and weighted those who respond that wisdom toward the foolish and the weak and the nothing (verses 27-28) so that when the redeemed stand before God, not one of them can point to anything in the flesh, wisdom, power, birth, or attainment, as the reason they are there. Boasting before God is not merely discouraged; it is designed out of His

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wisdom. Man cannot add to it, and if he does, he desecrates the very wisdom that brings salvation, the complete sufficiency of the crucified Christ.

## Verse 30: From Him, in Christ, Our Everything

Then the positive counterpart, and the source of it all. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus. By His doing is ἐκ ἐκ αὐτός autos, from Him, out of Him: the whole of the believer's standing originates in God, not in himself. You are in Christ Jesus, the positional reality followed from the opening of the letter, and even that position is God's placing, not the believer's achieving. Here is the final answer to boasting: no one installs himself in Christ; God does. If a believer's very being in Christ is from Him, nothing is left that is from the believer.

And in Christ the believer has everything the flesh could never supply. Christ became to us wisdom from God, σοφία sophia, and then righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Here the second sense of the wisdom of God, comes to fruition. Wisdom is no longer only God's truth; it is a person, Christ, who became wisdom from God for His people. The Greek of Corinth hunted a wisdom to satisfy his framework; God gave His people a wisdom who is a crucified and risen Lord, and in Him are three further benefits. The point for the argument about boasting is plain: every category in which a person might seek to stand before God, to be wise, righteous, holy, or free, the believer receives as a gift located in Christ and sourced from God. Nothing is generated by the flesh; everything is received in the Son.

## Doctrinal Excursus: Christ Our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption

The four terms are not simply strung out as a flat list of equal items. The Greek joins them so that σοφία sophia, wisdom, stands as the head term, and the three that follow, (δικαιοσύνη dikaiosunē; ἁγιασμός hagiasmos; ἀπολύτρωσις apolutrōsis), unfold what that wisdom concretely is for us: Christ became to us wisdom from God, and this wisdom shows itself as righteousness and sanctification and redemption. The wisdom of God is not an abstraction but the saving work of Christ, spelled out in its effects. The wisdom the Greek could not find turns out to be the concrete rescue of sinners in the three tenses of their need.

*Righteousness*, δικαιοσύνη dikaiosunē. Christ became our righteousness, our right standing before God, credited to us and not produced by us. This answers guilt. The believer is declared righteous not on the basis of his own record, wise or otherwise, but on the basis of Christ, who is our righteousness. The no-boasting purpose of verse 29 is emphasized in this fact: a righteousness received gives no right to boast.

*Sanctification*, ἁγιασμός hagiasmos. This calls for care, because a distinction was drawn back in the third lesson. There we saw two sanctifications: the positional setting-apart that is God's work alone and forms the believer's identity the moment he believes (Hebrews 10:10, 14), and the practical setting-apart that believers themselves pursue (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). Which stands here? The

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context settles it. Christ became our sanctification; it is His doing, ἐκ ἐκ αὐτός *autos*, received in Him, standing alongside righteousness and redemption as a gift. This is the positional sanctification, the same identity assigned in 1:2, where the Corinthians are called sanctified in Christ Jesus, a completed act with abiding effect. Christ Himself is the believer's holiness before God. This does not erase the believer's calling to set himself apart in practice, but that practical work is the response to this positional provision, never its cause. What Christ became for us is not a project we complete but a standing we already hold in Him.

*Redemption*, ἀπολύτρωσις *apolutrōsis*. The word carries the picture of release secured by the payment of a ransom. Christ became our redemption, our liberation purchased at the price of His blood, the truth the letter states plainly later, you were bought with a price (6:20, 7:23). The believer is not self-owned and self-freed; he is bought, and the purchase is Christ's act, not his own.

Set the three together and the point is unmistakable. In Christ the believer is counted righteous, set apart as holy, and bought back from bondage, and every one of these is from God and located in the Son. There is no possible reason the flesh might insert a boast. The wisdom the world could not find is the whole of a sinner's salvation, given entirely in Christ.

### Verse 31: Boast in the Lord

The paragraph closes where its logic requires, with a command drawn from the Prophets. So that, just as it is written, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.

The quotation compresses Jeremiah 9:23-24:

Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not the rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me.

The wise, the mighty, the rich: Jeremiah had already named nearly the same three that stand in verse 26: the wise, the mighty, the noble. Paul reaches for the one Old Testament text that had already forbidden boasting in exactly these categories, and its conclusion is condensed to a single line. The one who boasts has one permissible object left, the Lord.

This is the note the whole section resolves onto. Boasting is not abolished but redirected. The human impulse to glory in something, to find self-worth, is not stamped out but turned away from the self and its wisdom, power, and standing, and fixed on the Lord who is Himself our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. To boast in the Lord is simply to deflect glory from oneself and put it on the Lord. Why are you worth something, why are you valued above creation, above the angels? Everything we are before God, we are in Christ and from God.

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## SUMMARY

Now the “ought” held in reserve since verse 18 arrives, and it is the point toward which the whole argument from the wisdom of the cross has been driving.

The “is” has been established across two lessons. God’s wisdom and power are revealed in the cross, not in human cleverness (verses 18-25). God’s wisdom and truth for salvation is antithetical to the world’s wisdom. Man left to his own could not reach Him. God chose the seemingly foolish and weak and lowly things. Those who choose to follow this will be estimated in the same way. God’s truth sourced the whole of the believer’s standing, wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption, in Christ alone (verses 26-30). That is the settled state of things.

The “ought” follows—do not boast in the flesh; boast only in the Lord (verses 29, 31). And it comes home to Corinth at the exact point of its problems. The factions were boasting, glorying in men, ranking teachers by wisdom and eloquence, prizing status and taking sides. This entire movement has been dismantling the ground beneath that boasting. If no flesh may boast before God, no faction may boast in its favorite teacher’s wisdom. If everything the believer has is a gift received in Christ, no faction can claim to have earned what another was denied. The cure for “I am of Paul and I am of Apollos” is not a truce between the parties but the collapse of the whole boasting economy that produced them, and its replacement by a single shared boast in the one Lord to whom the whole church equally belongs.

The application reaches past Corinth to us. Wherever we are tempted to prize ourselves, our teachers, our tradition, our learning, or our standing as though any of it were the ground of our place before God, verse 31 recalls us: let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. We come to the Scriptures not to sharpen a wisdom we can be proud of but to know more of the Christ who is our wisdom. We serve not to build a record we can glory in but out of gratitude for a standing already given. The believer has exactly one thing worth boasting in, and it is not himself. It is the Lord.

From here, the letter turns to Paul himself. In chapter 2, his own coming to Corinth embodies the very principle taught here: he came not with superiority of speech or wisdom, not with the σοφία λόγος sophia logos set aside in 1:17, but in weakness and fear and much trembling, preaching Christ crucified, so that their faith would rest not on the wisdom of men but on the power of God. The pattern the church is called to, no boasting in the flesh and boasting only in the Lord, is first modeled in the apostle’s own ministry. We take that up next.