

GLORYING IN THE LORD

I Corinthians 1:26-31

There is an irresistible tendency in people to glory in somebody or something. All classes of men glory. Sometimes good people have a tendency to glory in unworthy objects, so God has prepared a cure for it--not by repressing the instinct, but by giving it a worthy subject. The prevention or cure of glorying in self, in men or in riches is glorying in the Lord.

Continuing his teaching concerning the divisions, and the peril arising from them, to the true fulfilment of the function of the church in Corinth, Paul reminded those to whom he wrote that the things of supposed human wisdom are futile and powerless. In his letter he mentioned "the foolishness of God." What a striking expression! Of course, the expression is akin to that in verse twenty-one, "the foolishness of preaching." It means that the simplicity of God is wiser than men. We are also told that the weakness of God is stronger than man. The weakness of God refers to the cross. Christ was crucified through weakness. He, the omnipotent One, chose in infinite grace to take the place of a helpless prisoner in the hands of His enemies. Yet, the doctrine of the cross, though regarded by men as foolish, absurd and powerless, has more of wisdom and power than anything which ever proceeded and from man.

There are two kinds of wisdom, the one human and the other divine. There are, therefore, two classes of wise men; those possessing the wisdom which is from men, and those who have the wisdom which comes from God. Few of the former class become Christians; therefore, it is not by wisdom that men find out God, which is what Paul sought to prove.

Paul introduces a new argument in proof of the total inadequacy of human wisdom. This argument was derived from their religious experience. To them he said, "Behold your calling, brethren!" Your calling refers to the call of God by His Word and Spirit. Of course, the calling is to the Christian life.

What else did Paul want the Corinthians to see? "How that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." It is not implied, however, that the church at Corinth was composed exclusively of the humbler elements of the population. There were some men of culture, influence and nobility among her members, but not many. Not many of those in high places were called.

The world has advanced its cause and based its prospects on power and prestige. It has also pyramided power on worldly honor. But, the things which elevate man in the world--knowledge, rank and influence--are not the things which lead to God and salvation. Human distinctions are insignificant and inefficacious in the sight of God, who is sovereign in the distribution of His grace.

Christianity has never advanced by political influence, wealthy patrons or the nobles of society. Its Founder and His disciples were poor and of humble social position, and in the ranks of the early Christians were comparatively few possessing means, learning or rank. Most of the converts in apostolic times were either slaves or freedmen. In gathering those who constitute His kingdom, it has not pleased God to choose many from among the wise, the mighty, the noble or the great of this world. Not many from these ranks have been numbered among the adherents of Christianity. The early disciples were neither highborn nor highly cultured. They were lowborn peasants. They were uneducated. They were Jews whom the world despised. They belonged to the smallest geographical section of the ancient world. Prior to the crucifixion, they were a dozen weak, vacillating, incompetent men. After the resurrection and Pentecost, eleven of them were bold, fearless, resolute, death-defying, intrepid revolutionists of a new life.

Christian history tells the story of grace reaching down to the lowest, the poorest, the most insignificant and the most unpromising, bringing such to repentance, creating faith

in their souls by the word of truth, regenerating them, justifying them from all things, sanctifying them by the Holy Spirit and the Word, and then sending them out as ambassadors for Christ to turn the world upside down by the simplicity of preaching the message of the cross. The earlier followers of the Lord Jesus Christ were, with very few exceptions, men from the lower walks of life: fishermen, tax collectors, Galilean peasants. Judas was considered the "gentleman" of the entire apostolic band. He was from Judea, the treasurer of the little company, and he turned traitor. But God filled those men from the common walks of life with the Holy Spirit and through them won thousands more to a saving knowledge of His Son. Saul of Tarsus stands out in vivid contrast, and one who, whether saved or not, would have had some great place among the people of that day, but he is the one who penned the words we are considering, and he thanked God that to him it was given to be used of God to bring to nought the things that are.

It is a remarkable thing that Paul asked the Corinthians to observe. Those whom the world looks upon as fools are frequently God's wise ones, and vice versa. So it is with the weak and the strong. Rank and wealth, intellect and education, valuable in God's sight when dedicated to Him, have a natural tendency to minister to self-satisfaction and make men independent of God.

There are those who think that their churches would be greatly improved if they had some highly intellectual people in their fellowship. There are those who wish that they had some mighty people in their membership, that is, those who are characterized by remarkable ability. Then, there are a few who have a special interest in acquiring the noble, that is, those who are wellborn. Not even the Lord could build a church with just "the four hundred." Instead of attempting to do something with either or all of these classes, He chooses those of lowly birth and of no repute in the world's estimation to accomplish great things for Him. He delights to take up those on whom the world frowns and to make them into devoted saints and faithful servants to the praise of His glory throughout all the ages to come.

God chooses whom He pleases. He chooses the ignorant in order that He may confound the wise. Likewise, He chooses the weak in order that He may confound the mighty, that is, that He may put them to shame by convincing them of the little value of the things on which they pride themselves, and by exalting over them those whom they despise. He often chooses those who are utterly despised and treated with contempt by those who make themselves known and felt in order to reduce them to inactivity or to render them inoperative. So many people forget that knowledge, rank and power do not attract the favor of God or secure for their possessors any preference before Him. This fact should cause the exalted to become humble and the humble to be comforted.

God's purpose in thus exalting His humble and obedient children is to demonstrate His power. He would prove that feeble agencies in His hands are infinitely more mighty than the greatest and most influential not so placed. A "bruised reed" in His hand is more than a sword in another's. Men think that things which are seen are powerful, but that which is unseen is much more so. The foolish things confound the wise, the weak things the mighty, the despised things the highly esteemed, because God is in the former and not in the latter.

Another great purpose of God in thus dealing with men, calling the ignorant rather than the wise, the lowly instead of the great, is that no man should boast before Him. No one can stand in His sight and attribute his salvation to his own wisdom, or birth, or station, or to anything else by which he is favorably distinguished from his fellowmen.

Human pride has been the curse of man's existence--it has separated him from God, and led to a fearful multiplication of transgression. When God works in man, the very first effect is the abasement of pride. Pride is of the devil.

Had God taken up the wealthy, the powerful and the proud, it would have given the flesh a large place in the eyes of men at least, but by choosing the weak things He had the greater opportunity to manifest His own power. In themselves they could not accomplish anything, but through Him they did valiantly. Therefore, all the glory belongs not to them but to Him. For men to glory in anything of his own qualities, powers or attainments is to substitute self for God and to invite God to put him to shame and to bring him to nought. He has said, "My glory will I not give to another." So, henceforth, we are not to glory in men--neither in others or in ourselves--but we must glory in the Lord. Anybody who gives to others or to himself the glory which belongs alone to God will certainly incur the divine displeasure.

It is declared in verse thirty that certain things are made available to us in Christ. Any standing that we have we owe to Him, not to anything that we, of ourselves, are or have or know. The only standing of real importance to the Christian is that which he has in Christ. He is the real source of wisdom. From Christ, our wisdom, proceed three great things expressed in three tremendous words--righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

What is righteousness? Sometimes a word becomes more powerful when it is shortened. Rightness is the same thing. Shorten it again and the word is a little more dynamic--right. What is right? Right is perfect conformity to a standard. What is the standard? There is only one, and that is what the world has yet to learn. What is it? God Himself. Righteousness, or rightness, or right, in human life is conformity to the standard which is found in God and revealed in Christ Jesus. Paul says here Christ is made that to us. In Christ we attain to a state of life impossible otherwise or elsewhere.

We had no righteousness of our own. All that we thought to be such, we have learned, is but as filthy or polluted rags in the sight of an infinitely holy God. We are made the righteousness of God in Christ. When we receive Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us.

What is sanctification? To be sanctified is to be set apart. It is to be set apart to God in Christ in the perfection of His finished work. It is the effect of the death of Christ on the relation of a believer to God by which, the defilement of sin being put away, he is set apart to Him. That Christ is made sanctification to believers implies that they are thus set apart to God in contrast to their former condition of alienation from Him.

What is meant here by redemption? It signifies a releasing or a deliverance. We who sold ourselves for nought have been redeemed without money. "Redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." He gave Himself for us, in order that we might be delivered from the fear of death and enter into life eternal. Deliverance from the penalty, the power and the presence of sin is ours in and through Christ.

Since all that we are in Him we owe to God, there is no room for personal boasting. All the glory of our salvation should be ascribed to Him and not to ourselves. The fact that we are indebted to the Lord for every good thing should keep us from glorying in self or in anyone else, save our blessed Lord. God has brought us into this blessed and fruitful union with Christ in order that we might "glory in the Lord."