



## The End of All Human Boasting

*Series: Renown 2010*

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

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**Introduction:** The entire focus of this weekend has been boasting in that which really matters...boasting in the cross, boasting that we know God... As we study this text, it is important for us to understand the context of what is going on when Paul writes this letter. The Corinthian church is a church that is eaten up with boasting, with self-glorifying, with self-exaltation. They are proud of their gifts and abilities. They are proud of their spiritual knowledge. They were boasting of their superiority amongst one another and their superiority amongst their pagan neighbors. Their pride was creating division within the church and an arrogant isolationism from the very people of society who needed to hear the gospel. They had stopped boasting in the cross. For that reason, Paul writes to them, clearly showing that the word of the cross, the gospel rightly received and walked in, must be the end of all human boasting. I want you to see with me first.

### 1) **The word of the cross is the end of all human boasting because it is the wisdom and power of God and not of men. (v.18-25)**

Notice what Paul says here 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. (1Co 1:18)** The cross, more than anything else in history causes a great divide, the greatest of divides. The word of the cross, according to Paul, is folly, literally moronic and absurd, to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God. Two poles. Two very different reactions.

To those who are perishing, the word of the cross is absurd and moronic from their perspective because it is **offensive**. It is offensive to human pride. To say that I am a sinner in need of a savior, to say that my sins, my rejection of God and of His law has rendered me incapable of eternal good, to say that my sins deserve the eternal wrath of God, to say that it is only through the saving work of Jesus Christ that I can be approved by God, to say that I do not have it within

my power to save myself, to declare that I am entirely dependant upon the mercy of God – that is fine...but when I say that it is also true of you, that is offensive.

Why? Think about this. God made man to gravitate toward Him, to acknowledge with joy and obedience that He is the center of all, that He alone is God, but the heart of our rebellion is that each one of us wants to be our god. We make ourselves the center of all of our thoughts, hopes, and imagining. We are by nature self-righteousness, self-promoting and we manufactured religions and invent gods that serve our self-exaltation. That is why the cross to some is such folly and foolishness. The word of the cross says: **(Rom 5:6-10)**. The word of the cross condemns our self-righteousness. It condemns our way of living and serving ourselves and says that the life that we have been living is worthless and worthy of judgment from God.

The word of the cross is absurdity to those who are perishing because it is **foolishness** to him. That one man (even the Son of God) could die on a piece of wood on a nondescript hill in a nondescript part of the world and thereby determine the destiny of every person who has ever lived seems foolish. It allows no sovereign self-determination.

The word of the cross is absurdity to those who are perishing because it is **weak** to him. That any religion that has at its very core the image of a beaten, broken, bloodied man dying the death of a common criminal must be a weak religion. But Paul would say that this "weakness" was stronger and more powerful than any man. By the cross, God powerfully accomplished what no man, or collection of men, from this or any age could ever have accomplished. He accomplished the salvation of sinners and made rebels into worshippers of God.

The word of the cross is an absurdity to those who are perishing because it is **unwanted** by them. The gospel is what they need, but it is not what they demand. Verse 22 tells us: **For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom. (1Co 1:22)** The Jews rejected the word of the cross because they wanted a sign, which is just a nice way of saying that they wanted to see God do as they expected that he should do. The Jews were ready to receive Christ as long as he performed up to their specifications and demands. Their expectation of the Messiah was that of a conquering king who would exalt and re-establish Israel as a powerful nation, throwing off the Roman yoke. But instead of a king sitting on a throne, they got a Messiah hanging on a cross -- that kind of Messiah was a stumbling block to Jews for two reasons.

First it was a stumbling block because according to the law, everyone who hung on a tree was cursed of God. **(Deu 21:22-23)** No Messiah could suffer that indignity. But second, the word of the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews because it tells us: **Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"-- (Gal 3:13)** Christ died on the tree not for his own sins, but to deliver His people from the curse of the broken law of God. Christ Jesus came into this world to redeem His people from the curse. He purchased people with His own blood upon the cross. Christ did this by becoming a curse Himself. In other words, He bore upon Himself the punishment of suffering, death, sin, and the wrath of His Father that was due to us. The Jews who rejected the word of the cross could not see that because, in their self-righteousness and vain boasting, they could not see that they had broken the law and were under the curse of God

The Greeks on the other hand sought for wisdom. Greeks wanted wisdom. God had to meet their standards of what God should be before they would give Him a hearing, and quite frankly, the cross didn't meet that requirement. The word of the cross was the issue. They could agree that there was one God, perhaps. One supreme God. They could make that fit with their pantheon of gods and goddesses. One God most high...okay. They could go with the thought that man had fallen short of God's glory. Certainly the philosophers agreed that the common people have their faults.

God sent his Son to be the revelation of God and of his will and to make peace with man. That's okay too. But when Paul announced the gospel as he did in Philippians 2: **(Php 2:5-8)**. That was the breaking point. A crucified hero, a humble God, a dying savior, a cross, just wasn't dignified or high sounding enough to the Greeks. It was absurd to them. And besides where was the part about man being the hero? Man was always the hero in their stories. The word of the cross just does not appeal to the proud and those who are enamored with own self-righteousness or those who revel in human boasting and in their supposed brilliance. But Paul has some sharp words for them and they show us that God is not concerned for the wisdom of fallen men:

**For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." (1Co 1:19)** Paul first uses a quotation in verse 19 from Isaiah 29:14 to emphasize that the wisdom of men does not bring life. When Isaiah made the prophecy, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, was planning to conquer Judah. He had arrayed his army around them and King Hezekiah had already offered and given gold and silver from the temple treasury to

Sennacherib so that he would leave them alone, but Sennacherib was determined to take Jerusalem. God told Isaiah not to worry or fear, because the king's plan would fail. But it would not fail because of the strength of Judah's army or because of appeasement strategy of King Hezekiah and his advisors. Judah would be saved solely by God's power, with no human help. God ended the siege in one night by destroying 185,000 men of the Assyrian army with just one angel. The full account is given in 2 Kings 18-19. Here is the point of the quotation: Just as God was the giver of life in Isaiah's day, apart from the strategies and the wisdom of men, He is the giver of life through the word of the cross now. Man's wisdom is worthless in salvation.

Paul presses the point home with four stinging questions. **Where is the one who is wise (with the wisdom of the world)? Where is the scribe (the religious experts)? Where is the debater of this age (the philosopher)? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1Co 1:20)** For all of his wisdom, man has not changed, except in finding more ways to express and excuse our fallen human nature. We have become more creative in our heresies and more creative in our sinning. Throughout history human wisdom has never basically changed and has never solved the basic problem of man which is sin and the separation from God that is the result.

Look at verse 21. **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. (1Co 1:21)** What is this verse saying? With all their supposed wisdom men have never been able to know God, much less come to a personal relationship with Him and that is His plan all along. God never intended to be known by human reasoning. God never intended to be known through human philosophy. God intended for man to come to him only through divine revelation, through His spoken Word and through His incarnate Word, and specifically Paul says here -- through the preaching of the gospel. **It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.** He chose to use that which the world's wisdom counts as moronic, as **absurdity**, to save those of the world who would simply **believe**. For those who will exchange their wisdom for His, God offers new birth and new life through the power of the cross of Jesus Christ, His Son. I like what John MacArthur says about this foolishness, **"Paul is not talking about foolish preaching, of which there has always been more than enough. He is talking about the preaching of that which is foolish in the world's eyes—the simple, unadorned, uncomplicated truth of the cross of Jesus Christ that allows no place for man's wisdom or man's work or man's glory. The wisdom and work and glory are all God's. But the blessing they give can be man's."** When a man recognizes its own bankruptcy and stops boasting in a greatness that he does not have and turns in faith to Jesus Christ, whose saving work is the **cross**, he can exchange wrath for mercy, judgment for grace, spiritual poverty for

riches, sin for righteousness, despair for hope, death for life. The simplicity of the gospel gives what the complexity of human wisdom promises but never delivers.

At this point, the Corinthians would have whole-heartedly agreed with Paul. They would have been in total agreement with what he said, only they would have used his words as an opportunity for personal boasting in their wisdom and strength to choose the wisdom and power of God! To that Paul says:

**But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1Co 1:24)** He steals any opportunity for them to boast in themselves and to lord it over the lost by stating very clearly that the only difference between those who rejected the gospel and those who received it is was the power of the Holy Spirit calling them to salvation and granting them faith to believe in Christ. How does a person change from being one of those who are perishing to one of those who are being saved? The Holy Spirit has to touch their heart and their minds and regenerate them by His effectual calling until they no longer see the gospel as foolishness, but they perceive it as the power of God unto salvation, and they believe. God must call His people unto Himself and open the eyes of their spiritual understanding to see the glory of God in the face of Christ crucified and give them faith to believe. That is nothing to boast in. We are no different from the mass of unbelieving and lost people. They only difference is the saving grace of God. There is no room for arrogant isolationism...that is just plain foolishness.

**For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1Co 1:25)** Salvation is not the achievement of human wisdom or of human potential, or of human works; it is the embrace of God's sovereign, awesome, sin destroying, wrath absorbing, righteousness bestowing, act of gracious love and loving grace at Calvary. **The word of the cross is the end of all human boasting because it is the wisdom and power of God and not of men.** Even more , human boasting is undone by God's choice of His people.

**2) The word of the cross is the end of all human boasting because of who it saves. (v. 26-29)**

Without mincing words, without pulling any punches, Paul provides the Corinthians with a very sobering, very unflattering description of themselves. He asks them to consider the circumstances of their own calling, to think about what kind of people they were when they first responded to the Gospel. Paul's words make it clear that if they were honest with themselves, they would have to admit that very few of them were people whom Corinthian society would have considered to be wise, or powerful, or noble. . First of all, they were not brilliant or particularly wise. They were not wise according to a worldly standard. There were some in that church from the educated classes in Corinth, but most of the people in the church were uneducated. In the second phrase Paul says that they were not the influential and socially important. The word translated "powerful," or "mighty" or "influential," referred to the ruling class of a society. Most of the church members in Corinth had no influence in Corinth's political power structure. The third phrase says, "...Not many noble," or well-born, literally the aristocracy. Again, there were some in the church from nobility; we know some of their names from the book of Acts. But by and large, most of the Corinthian Christians were from the lower ranks of society, including the slave class, those who would have been considered "nobodies" by the rest of the culture.

What Paul is saying to these people is, "You know what sort of people you were when God called you out of sinful darkness into the light of salvation. You know that he did not receive you as his child because you were brilliant or wealthy or powerful or influential, or important, because most of you weren't at all. Moreover, those of you whose lives were defined that way were saved in spite of those positions, not because of them." The salvation of God is entirely of God's grace.

In 178 A.D. a pagan Roman philosopher named Celsus wrote these sarcastic words about Christians: *"Let no cultured person draw near, none wise and none sensible, for all that kind of thing we count evil; but if any man is ignorant, if any man is wanting in sense and culture, if anybody is a fool, let him come boldly [to become a Christian]...We see them in their own houses, wool dresses, cobblers, the worst, the vulgarest, the most uneducated persons...They are like a swarm of bats or ants creeping out of their nest, or frogs holding a symposium around a swamp, or worms convening in mud."*

The one thing that the gospel does is eliminate any human pride. The word of the cross devastates human pride. It shows us our sin and God's holiness. It makes very clear that the natural things that make for distinctions among men serve only to condemn every man before

the throne of God. There is only one way of salvation. It is the same for all of us – wise and foolish, weak and strong, noble and low or despised, rich and poor, honorable or dishonorable. The word of the cross bids us come out of the gate of the city to the hill of Golgotha, and to lift our eyes to the Man on the cross, nails driven through His wrists, covered with the blood of His scourging, gasping for breath, forsaken by His Father, and rejected by the world and says “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. He is wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Will you bow the knee before Him as your Savior and King?”

In his wisdom God cuts off the way of proud and opens a way to glory and to God that the proud man cannot stand, namely, the way of the cross. You cannot maintain your dignity and be saved. Your reputation, your standing, your influence, your status... Salvation is a work of God’s grace. The cross is a work of God’s grace. That is the point of Paul’s words here. There is no room for boasting. God did not choose His people according to human standards...everyone who is Christ’s needed that sacrifice of a crucified Savior in our place. That any of us is saved is the result of God’s sovereign grace and Christ’s saving death.

"God chose ..... God chose ..... God chose .... so that no human being might boast in the presence of God....." What can a saint boast about in God's presence? Paul says that God's intention was to set apart his people and to save them in such a way that there could be no possible grounds for human boasting on their part. **The word of the cross is the end of all human boasting because of who it saves.** And last:

**3) The word of the cross is the end of all human boasting because it magnifies Christ alone (v. 30-31)**

If you are today united to Christ, a stone in the building of which He is both, foundation and head, if you are a part of His body, you didn’t get there by yourself. If you have life in Christ, if you are being saved, it is by the power and will of God. God is the source of your life in Jesus Christ and He has made Christ crucified to be **our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (v. 31)**

1) The crucified Christ is our wisdom – It is through Christ and Him crucified that we may know God intimately. It is He who makes us to know God. It is by His blood. **(Heb 10:19-23)**

2) The Crucified Christ is our righteousness – It is He that is our righteousness. Naturally we are unrighteous, all our righteousness as filthy rags, unable to stand before the great King. On Calvary transpired the greatest exchange of all time and eternity. Christ the Substitute of his people (Isaiah 53) was weighed down with our guilt and trespasses just as if he himself had committed those sins, and we were given His righteousness. (2Cor 5:21)

Think about this beloved believer in Christ; this day you are as righteous before God as you were the moment that you believed and as righteous as you will ever be. In yourself, you are a sinner worthy to be condemned, but God does not condemn you, and he never will, for before His eye you are clothed in perfect righteousness.

3) The Crucified Christ is our sanctification – It is by Him and in Him that we are set apart to God for His good pleasure. We have been set apart as the people of God. It is in Him and through Him and by abiding in Him that we are made evermore into His image. **(Gal 2:20)**

4) The Crucified Christ is our redemption – He has delivered us from the slavery and death of sin into the freedom of the sons of God. The Apostle Paul has in mind not only the redemption of our souls, but the redemption of our bodies, when corruptible puts on incorruption, when mortal puts on immortality, when we are freed not only from the penalty and the power of sin, but from its very presence.

And our ultimate purpose is to spend eternity worshiping and giving praise to our pre-eminent Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God is saving a chosen, redeemed humanity that will glorify and serve the Son forever, seeing with unveiled eyes and responding with unashamed hearts to the glory of Christ. While we are here, this is what it means to glorify God – to give him all the glory for our calling, our election, our salvation, our ongoing sanctification, our preservation, and our ultimate entry into glory. Boast in the Lord.

## Application

The purpose of God in the creation of man and the salvation of sinners is that we might boast in Him. This is God's will for you this morning. Boast in the Lord. It will be the end of all human boasting and:

- It will make the word of the cross, the work of the cross, and the Christ of the cross beautiful to us.
- Christ will be lifted up and the hearts of the people of God will be knitted together to magnify Christ and it will be the end of any division.
- It will kill the heart of arrogant isolationism and will drive us to see others boast in the Lord
- It will be the fuel of seeking God in His word so that we boast in Him even more.
- We will be what we were created to be, a people who glory in God through Christ alone by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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