

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Every church has its problems and the church at Corinth was no exception. One of its problems was that its members wanted recognition by the world and status in this world.

This problem showed itself in the way the people formed themselves into parties behind church leaders. Some identified themselves with Apollos, the significant preacher. Others identified themselves with Peter, the significant disciple. Others identified themselves with Paul, the significant founder of their church. Others outdid them all by identifying themselves with Christ, the Significant One. They believed Jesus was Lord but they also wanted to have significance and status in this world as well.

Such pride and the inevitable divisions and party spirit that followed needed addressing and Paul, their church founder and pastor, confronted them with two gospel truths.

The first truth was God's principle of operation in his kingdom. God has a deliberate strategy. He chooses what is foolish in this world to shame the wise and what is weak in this world to shame the strong (1:27). He is against the proud and arrogant and on the side of the humble and lowly.

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This principle is illustrated above all in the preacher's message. It is a message of the cross. At the heart of the gospel message is the brutal Roman punishment for serious crime. It is the despised and humiliating instrument of death. In the world's way of thinking to talk of a crucified Christ was folly. The Jews found it scandalous. They were looking for a saving Messiah who would conquer their enemies with the sword. They were hoping for a leader who would drive the Roman army into the Mediterranean Sea and proclaim freedom in the promised land. They were seeking a leader blessed by God with military victories and crowd acclaim. To speak of a crucified Christ was anathema. According to Deuteronomy, such was a man who was cursed by God. But this humiliated and despised Christ was at the centre of Paul's preaching. God's Christ had to become accursed, argued Paul, so he would save his people from their sins.

The principle was also illustrated by the type of people God chose to save. In general the Christians at Corinth were not noble, wise or powerful. They were the lowly and the despised for the most part. Admittedly Crispus and Sosthenes were synagogue leaders before they joined the church and would probably have been considered as leading Jewish citizens and Erastus was the town clerk and certainly would have been considered a leading citizen but they would be among the "not many". Mostly the Christians were "the foolish and weak" and they were deliberately chosen by God to confound the wise and strong of this world.

God's folly is wiser than men and his weakness stronger than men (1:25)

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The second truth Paul outlined was the magnificence of Christ and his work. Christ is the source of all life. All we need to know about God for salvation is known through Christ. He is the Wisdom of God.

The clever people of Corinth were clever enough in comparison with the rest of the world but they could not, in their wisdom, gain a knowledge of God. And how could they? You don't have to be a twenty-first century person to realize the universe is a massive place and that we hardly know anything about the world and universe in which we live. Human intelligence and wisdom simply cannot understand the handiwork of God and thus certainly not understand God himself.

But through Christ we can know God because Christ came from God and Christ was God. He is the Wisdom of God.

Paul discovered this on the road to Damascus. When Christ revealed himself to Paul, Paul asked, "Who are you Lord?" Jesus answered, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting". Two truths followed for Paul. The first is that Jesus is the Lord and thus the God of Israel. This would require enormous changes in the way Paul was to think of God but change he must in the light of this revelation in him.

The second truth was the union Christians enjoy with Jesus. This became evident when Jesus implied that he is united to Christians, for he said, to persecute them is to persecute Christ. Christians are people who have been united with Christ. God then is the source of our life "in Jesus Christ". We have nothing in ourselves to boast before God but Christ is our wisdom and in him we have everything to boast.

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Paul goes on to explain further what this means.

This means that Christ is our righteousness. Yes Christ was cursed when hung on a cross. However it was our curse he endured not his own. Our union with Christ meant he bore the curse for our sin and we received his righteousness. So now because of our being united in his death we have the righteousness of God.

This means Christ is our sanctification. Not only have we been united in his death but we have also been united with him in his resurrection and exaltation. We have been raised with Christ to a new life in Christ. We have received his Holy Spirit. By faith we are now seated with him in the heavenly realm.

This means Christ is our redemption. When Christ shall be revealed in all his glory at his Coming we also will be revealed in his glory with him. Christ has paid the ransom price by his death. He has given us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our participation in Christ's glory. This body of death which we now inhabit will be transformed into a glorious body. We shall be caught up to be with the Lord forever.

So what is the status and significance of the believer? We belong to the community who have died, been raised and will be glorified with Christ! Now that is some status and significance! So heed the apostle, "Let him/her who boasts, boast in the Lord".