

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

In the name of Christ Jesus, our Savior, dear friends,

I knew someone once who could really only talk about himself and all the great things he had done and was doing. *His* opinion was the one that obviously mattered. Whatever you had done, he had done better. Everyone knew this about him. As you might imagine, people described him as conceited and arrogant.

You know what boasting and bragging sounds like. We’ve all heard it before, but the truth is that I have been guilty of this and you probably have been too. It may even be that some of us truly struggle with this kind of self-centeredness—our default is to talk about ourselves and not think much about others.

Whether we occasionally boast or we are more prone to it, *none* of us would *ever* have *anything* that we could boast or brag about before the almighty and holy God! But on the basis of Paul’s words to the Christians in the city of Corinth, I say to you this morning,

GO AHEAD AND BOAST!

Here’s the thing, though—this is a different kind of boasting. Paul says that the only kind of boasting that is appropriate is for you and me to boast

1. About God’s Love
2. About His Changes in You

It’s pretty interesting to see how Paul approaches this subject of bragging or boasting. He focuses on the Christian people to whom he was writing. He says to them, **...think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are...**

First of all, we cannot miss a basic truth that Paul repeats throughout these words. It is a truth found in his other letters, a truth found in all of Scripture. Did you notice how those believers came to believe in God? Paul says **you were called...God chose...God chose...He chose**. And in the next verse, which we will get to in a few minutes, he says **It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus**.

This is a fundamental truth of the Bible—whoever has saving faith has it because God called them to it. Because of the sinful nature of every person, no one could or would ever choose to believe in God and put their trust in him. Whoever believes does so because God—with undeserved love—reached out and gave them faith to trust in him. This is important to remember if we are to grasp what the apostle is saying here to the Corinthians and to us.

So Paul explains God's choosing a little bit here. He asks his readers to consider themselves for a moment. At that time, he was talking to Greek people to whom the gospel of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus was preached. He wanted them to think about the kind of people they were when God reached out to them with the message of the gospel. He says that **Not many...were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.**

Overall, God chose common people to be his people. That does not mean that none of the Corinthian Christians were worldly-wise, powerful, or of high social status. In fact, we know of Crispus, the synagogue leader who was converted to Christianity along with Erastus, who was the city treasurer—a public officer. But generally speaking, God picked normal, everyday kind of people to trust in Jesus. Did God want all of the people in the city to believe? Of course! God doesn't want anyone to die eternally! But many rejected his call then even as many do today.

Paul goes on to call these normal, everyday kind of people **foolish, weak, lowly, despised** “nothings”! That seems a little harsh. Or does it?

To the world, isn't that what most of them were? If they were not known for their worldly wisdom, then the wise ones in Corinth would have considered them foolish. If they did not flex political or social muscle, then they were weak in their eyes. If they were not part of Corinthian high society, then they were lowly. People like those called-to-faith Corinthians would have been looked down upon for all those reasons. The other people were “somebodies” but *they* were “nobodies.”

Besides all that, consider them from God's perspective. Before they were called by him to faith, their rejection of God made them foolish, not wise. They were weak compared to the almighty God. When viewed next to God Most High, they were as lowly as you can get. Sin made them despised in the eyes of the holy God. God is everything; they were truly “nothing.”

Yet God chose people like this. Why? Why did God do this? Paul tells us why: **so that no one may boast before him.**

No, there was not one Corinthian Christian who could boast before God and there is not one of us who can boast before him either. But they, and we, can boast ABOUT God. The last verse of our text says, **“Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”** There is something to talk a lot about, to talk excitedly about, to hype—and that is God’s love. Think about all the promotion, all the hype, all the boasting and bragging that has gone on for the last two weeks as fans of the Broncos and the Seahawks have prepared for the Super Bowl to be played this afternoon. Maybe you’re a fan of one of those teams, but if not, imagine it was your team that was playing today. You would have a lot to talk about, a lot to “talk up.” And if you can’t quite envision that, just imagine what the end of March is going to be like if our Wildcats make it to the Basketball National Championship! None of us play on the U of A basketball team, but we’ll be boasting nonetheless!

That’s all fine and good, but wouldn’t it be great if we all boasted about the Lord and how great he is? Sports aren’t for everyone, but forgiveness is. Some don’t care much for the Super Bowl, but everyone wants peace in their hearts. Although this is hard for us to believe around here, not everyone cares about the Wildcats; however everyone is concerned about what happens after they die. Shouldn’t we be hyping God’s love then? Shouldn’t we be boasting about God’s love?

Do we talk to others more about an undefeated basketball team or who we’ve got in the Super Bowl than we talk about God’s love that moved him to send his Son into the world so that he could die to save it? Shouldn’t we talk about the cross of Christ and his promise for every single person—that if they put their trust in him as their Savior, they have forgiveness for their sins and the sure hope of eternal life? Shouldn’t we boast in the Lord’s redeeming work? People need to hear that more than they need to hear our opinion on whether the Big Game should be played where it could snow or whether the #1 offense can beat the #1 defense or not.

God chose the lowly, weak, foolish, despised, “nothing” people to show how great his love is. What they couldn’t do, he did. What they couldn’t be, he made them into. They had nothing to do with it, God did it all. It was God’s love that did an amazing thing in their hearts and lives. And so they couldn’t boast about themselves, but they could boast about God’s love! We can do the same.

The application of God’s love to those people is so clear as Paul writes to them: **It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”**

It wasn’t just that they were “nothings” and God chose them. It was more than that. They were “nothings” and God made changes in them so that they became “somethings!”

God the Father sent Jesus, his one and only Son, to change those people. The wisdom of God was seen in Jesus. It was seen in his perfect life and it was seen in his handing over of that perfect life as a sacrifice for sin. That's what happened on the cross. And by God-given faith in Jesus, the foolishness and weakness and lowliness of their sin was taken away by Jesus and replaced with righteousness! In that moment, Jesus changed them personally.

Christ earned righteousness and gave it to them. Christ was holy and made them holy. Christ redeemed them—bought them back from eternal punishment. Christ did it all, and by faith, it was all applied to them. When God the Father looked down at each of those Corinthians, he saw righteous, holy, redeemed people—his people! God himself changed them through his Son and by the working of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

You certainly realize that God did this not only for those people—he's done the same for you! Christ didn't come into the world to live and die only for whoever first read Paul's letters. He didn't do that only for the Corinthians. Jesus did that for us too! He has made great changes in you too, hasn't he?

It's probably true among us as well that not many of us were much in the eyes of the world when God, in his love, called us. Many were babies, others were no one of great significance by worldly standards. Oh, maybe there were a few of you, kind of like the few we know about in Corinth, but mostly not. Still, before God, none of us was anything because of *our* sinfulness and *his* holiness. But what a change has taken place in you!

Christ's saving work while in this world was done for you too. The Holy Spirit gave faith to you too. And in that moment the great saving works of Jesus Christ—his perfection, his death, his resurrection—were applied directly to you! That made you a new person—a “new creation” is the way God puts it. You and I are something we were not before! Without God, we were “nothings” but God has made us “somethings”—just like he did for those Corinthian Christians! THAT is something to talk about—boast about even!

Certainly we realize that since we had nothing to do with the awesome things God did in Christ Jesus, any boasting we do could not be about ourselves. Our boasting would be about the changes GOD has made in us. And that really would be bragging about God and not us because, in order to explain the undeserved love of God, we would have to explain that we were unlovable because of our sinful nature! We would have to admit that we were *nothing* and GOD made us *something*! This kind of boasting is okay—it's even encouraged! It's encouraged because through our boasting, other people will learn something about God. They will hear about his great love and they will hear about the changes he makes in people's lives. And God uses this kind of boasting from his people to make those changes of forgiveness and salvation in the lives of others. So, GO AHEAD AND BOAST—to the glory of God and for that glorious, saving change in others. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.