

Called by The Grace of God: 1 Corinthians

1v26-2v5

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[0 : 00] A rest in men's wisdom, but in God's power. Thank you very much, Stephen.

Well, please keep your Bibles open. And we're going to pray. Let's do that now. Let's do that now.

Father, as we look at your word together, and as I speak, we pray that we would all be filled with the power of your Holy Spirit, so that our faith might rest not in our own clever thoughts, our own clever ideas, or anything about us, but our faith would rest in the one and only true God and his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, be at work amongst us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, sadly, division had taken place.

[1 : 57] Small groups within this church at Corinth had formed, and they all thought themselves to be spiritually superior. Have a look back at chapter 1, verse 11.

He tells us how the division came about. He says, What I mean is this.

One of you says, I follow Paul. You see, Paul started the church, and he baptized me, so I'm in Paul's gang.

Another said, Well, we follow Apollos. It was through his ministry that I got my great gifts, and I am where I am today. Still another said, Well, we follow Cephas, or Peter.

You know, he was a disciple of Jesus. He knew Jesus. He always knows what's best. We're in Peter's group. Instead of uniting around Christ and his cross, they were dividing over people and their status.

[3 : 08] Each group all looking down on each other, thinking themselves to be spiritually superior. Now, scratch the surface, and we can find the same things going on today.

You know, I've been in the church here now from the very beginning. I'm a founding member, you know. Well, I've been a Christian for 30 years. My church has seen three people come to faith in this last month, and last week we baptized five.

Well, our church has seen two new churches planted, and we're now planting our third. Our pastor, well, he's always invited to speak at conferences.

He's such a dynamic and well-liked guy. Well, our pastor, he led a healing service the other week, and 12 healings were reported. It's ugly, isn't it?

It causes division. Each one looking down on other people and other churches, thinking ourselves to be spiritually superior, that we're God's elite.

[4 : 21] So how do we, as Paul was encouraging them, to be perfectly united and to stop all this sinful behavior from taking effect?

Well, there's two big things that he teaches us, and they're really quite shocking, because they humble us.

The first thing that we must remember is that we are all foolish people called by grace. Foolish people called by grace.

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called.

So if you're a Christian here this morning, think about what your life was like when you became a Christian. And in case we can't remember what that was like, he goes on to show us.

[5 : 24] First, he reminds us that we had nothing to offer. Look at the rest of verse 26. Not many of you were wise by human standards.

Not many of you were influential. Not many of you were of noble birth. Some, perhaps, but I guess most of us here were not leading professors in the world of academics.

There may be some people, but most of us were not powerful CEOs or politicians influencing the nation's economy. There may be some who were born into great wealth, but most of us were not born with status and privilege.

It's really quite shocking. He's saying, catch yourselves on. We're a bunch of nobodies. As far as the world's elite and standards go, we're nothing.

We don't even register on the scale. Yes, of course, we have our education and we've got a few letters after our name, perhaps, and we've got a few qualifications, but we're not being chased up to have our thoughts published to the world.

[6 : 46] And when God looked at us, we weren't standing out in the crowd. We weren't spotted by God in Hello magazine or the pages of the Irish Times.

We had nothing to offer in the eyes of the world. We're just nothing special. And that's a very humbling thought, isn't it?

Because we all like to think we're somebody special. Or at the very least, I'm a little bit better than the person sitting next to me.

So if we have nothing to offer, how did we ever become a Christian in the first place?

Well, he goes on to remind us we have nothing to offer, but we have been chosen by God's grace.

Look at verse 27. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

[7 : 51] God chose the weak things, that is, weak people, to shame the strong. He chose the lowly people of the world and the despised people and the people that are not to nullify the things that are.

Let me make it crystal clear. We did not choose God. God chose us.

If you're a Christian, you didn't become a Christian because one day you woke up and you decided, today I think I'll become a Christian.

No. God chose you. God worked in your life in such a way that he gave you the desire to call out to God and he gave you the faith to believe in him.

And let's be clear that when God chose us and when he gave us that desire and that faith, it wasn't because any of us were particularly special. Do you remember your school days?

[9 : 01] Rewind the clock. There you are standing in the playground. They're picking teams to have a race. All the sporty people and the fast ones, they always got picked.

Wonder where you came in the pecking order. The ones that couldn't run weren't fast. Well, they were ignored, weren't they? Or do you remember your first time at the school dance?

The music slows and all the good-looking girls are swooped upon like bees round honey. Where were you? Were you ever asked to dance?

Rejected? And it's no different today as we get older. The world still picks the beautiful, the wealthy, the clever, and the popular ones.

The world likes them. But God does not choose by the standards of the world. God isn't influenced by anything about us, whether it's good or bad, how we look or what we do.

[10 : 07] He is simply motivated and driven by his grace. Look again at verse 27. God chose the foolish things, people like us, to shame the wise, to show that, well, wisdom does not give you credibility with God.

God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong, so those who are influential and powerful, that's got no street cred with God either. He chose the lowly things, the things that are nothing, to show the world that by their standards God works in a totally different way, motivated by his grace.

You see, if we are Christians, we can never ever say, it was me. I decided. Why?

Well, look what he says in verse 29. So that no one may boast before him. if ever I say, I'm a Christian because I, then I have reason for boasting.

Because then it becomes something I've done. I responded. I decided. And that makes me spiritually superior to the other person beside me.

[11 : 41] No, I didn't choose God. God chose me by his grace, motivated by his grace, so that he may show how great he is. So we have nothing to offer.

We're chosen by grace and nothing that we do. And third, and wonderfully, he says, we've been made God's new people. Look at verse 30. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus.

There we have it again, don't we? It's because of him. It's because of God, not us, that we are in Christ Jesus.

Now that little phrase there when it says we are in Christ Jesus is important. It means that we become part of Christ, that's true, but we become part of his body.

And we remember from last week, his body is the church, the family of God. So by his grace, he is taken weak and foolish and lowly and despised and nobodies and nothings and he takes us by his grace and he makes us his new people of God, the church.

[13:00] Verse 30. It's because of him that you are in Christ Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God. That is, Christ is our righteousness, Christ is our holiness and Christ is our redemption.

Christ on the cross took all our unrighteousness on himself and he took the punishment that we deserve and in its place he has clothed us with his righteousness so that we are now acceptable to God.

That is God's wisdom. And Christ has taken all our unholiness, all our impurity and he has now given us his holiness so that we can now begin to be living his way and treated as blameless.

That is God's wisdom. And Christ has redeemed us from a life of slavery to sin where we are always saying yes to sin and he has now filled us with his spirit and he has now given us a new way to live for him so we say yes to what is right.

That is God's wisdom. And it has all come to us through Jesus Christ. None of us by ourselves qualify us.

[14:21] It is all through him and he qualifies us he makes us his very own part of his body the church a righteous people a holy people and a redeemed people.

Now can you see what he's building up to in all of this? That once we begin to apply grace to our lives there is absolutely no room for superiority.

None of us here this morning can claim to be better or more deserving than the person next to us.

The reality is every single one of us are foolish.

Foolish people called by God's amazing grace. There is no elitism here. look again at verse 31 therefore as it is written let him who boasts boast in the Lord.

Not in myself not in my wisdom or my cleverness or my intellectuality or can't even say the word that's how intellectual I am. We have nothing to boast in only in Christ.

[15:42] So we are foolish people chosen by God's grace. Here is the second big thing he tells us. We are weak people. If you thought foolish was bad enough we are weak.

Weak people used by God's power. You see the reality is if we do anything for God if we lead somebody to Christ Christ.

If our church should manage to plant a new church it's not because of our superiority it's all because of God's power.

Did you get that? If we lead somebody to Christ or if our church happens to plant a new church if we do any kind of service it's not because of our superiority superiority or because we're special it's because of God's power.

First he reminds us that we are nothing special. Verse 1 chapter 2 verse 1 Paul says look it's exactly the same for me as it is for you.

[16:53] When I came to you brothers and sisters I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. I wasn't great at public speaking I wouldn't get a job in the lecture halls of Corinth.

No one was taking my number and asking me to come back and speak again. In fact verse 3 he says I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling.

Paul we know was a physically weak person. He was somebody who suffered bad health. We know that from his other letters. he struggled and he was fearful of going to such a great intellectual city like Corinth.

What if people don't listen to my message? What if they think the gospel is stupid? What if they have better debaters than me? And it all caused him such a great concern it tells us in verse 3 that he was trembling.

You know that knot that you get in your stomach where you just feel like throwing up. You're so nervous. That's how he feels as he entered into that city.

[18:09] And I imagine that's how we all feel at times. Perhaps we're the only Christian in our class or college. We're afraid that if we say something we won't know how to answer or we'll even look stupid to the rest of the class.

Maybe we're terrified that somebody at home or at work will find out that I'm one of those people who believe the Bible. Maybe we feel weak and inadequate because, well, we just go to that odd church that meets in the community center.

The point is, we're just nothing special. We're just ordinary folk. people who speak up. He says we're nothing special and we just have a very simple message.

Because when we do speak up, when we do say something, what we have to say seems utterly foolish and stupid to the world. Look at verse 2. He said, for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

we don't have some kind of new teaching that the world is going to love and we'll have all the reporters coming in wanting to declare it to the nations. We don't have this killer argument that's going to stop everybody in their tracks and make everybody listen.

[19 : 35] No, we've got a message he's been telling us in chapter 1 that the world thinks is foolish and stupid. Of course, there are those who change the message, to make it more popular and acceptable.

Like the new book that I saw advertised recently called The Power of I Am. Here's what the little blurb said on the back. The Power of I Am shows readers how they can redirect the course of their lives through the words they say.

When you speak the right words, the I Am's, you're inviting God's goodness into your life. I am victorious, I am blessed, I am talented, I am anointed.

Your words have creative power, with your words you can bless your future. Wow, sounds great, doesn't it? God's but it's not true.

It's not the gospel message. Paul says, verse 2, I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[20 : 49] I'm not going to change that message. I'm going to present to you Christ and the cross. That beaten, broken and disfigured body, hanging on the cross, bleeding and dying, rejected, mocked and ignored.

It may be weak and foolish to the watching world, but it is God's power to save people like you and me. So he says, look at you, look at us, we're nothing special.

And we've got a very simple message. But, we have God's great power.

Verse 4, he says, my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.

You see, if any good comes through us, if our church does anything that is good, it is all down to the power of God at work through simple people with a simple message.

[22 : 04] If somebody becomes a Christian through your witness, because you've shared your testimony, or you've given them a book, and you've explained to them something of the good news of Christ, and they turn to Christ, it's not because of you, it's God's power.

If we manage to plant a church, and as a group of churches, as we'll be thinking next Sunday, we delight in the fact that yes, so many churches have been planted, but it's not down to us, it's God's power.

If a pastor is used to grow a church, or if a pastor is used to do wonderful things, it's not him, it's God's power. It doesn't happen by our wisdom or persuasive words, it's not the message we choose, or the technology that we have, it's not slick presentations, or the dynamic speaker, or the amount of letters that comes after their name, or the colleges that they come from, it's all because of God's power at work in simple people with a simple message.

Why is it like this? Well, look at verse 5. So that our faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

We don't want people trusting in us, or the church. We don't want followers of a preacher or a program. We want people to follow Christ and his cross.

[23 : 41] You see, when we begin to apply this power and this grace of God in our lives, there is absolutely no room for superiority. not one of us here can stand up and say, it's because of me that God has done X, Y, or Z.

It's because of what I have or what I do or what I say that makes the difference. The reality is, we are all weak people used by God's power.

There is no elitism here. So how do we deal with spiritual superiority? If we spot it, if we see the roots of it in our own lives, if we begin to see it at work in the life of the church, how do we deal with

it?

How do we nip it in the bud and cut it out? Well, we remember that we're foolish people chosen by God's grace, and we are weak people used by God's power, and that changes everything.

Because instead of superiority, we now have humility, because we all suddenly wake up to the fact that well, I am nothing special, and I've got nothing to bring.

[25 : 05] Instead of superiority, we have equality, because we are all chosen by God's grace, all by the same simple message, all equally loved, and all equally treasured.

And instead of superiority, we now have unity. We are God's new people, gathered together as the holy, redeemed, and righteous people of God, gathered to serve him together with the gifts that he has given to us by his amazing power.

power. No elitism in the church of God. Humble, gracious people filled with the power of God.

Let's pray. Father, would you please help us to see ourselves correctly, not to see ourselves as the world looks at us, or to judge others by the standards of the world, but to see ourselves as you see us, as weak and as nothing, but changed by your amazing grace to become the righteous, holy and redeemed people of God, God's new community,

God's special people, filled with the power of your Holy Spirit. We thank you that it isn't because of us, anything we do or say, but all down to your amazing grace.

[27 : 14] We pray that you would work this deep into our lives, so that this church and that our lives would be marked with humility, with that equality, and that we would be strengthened in our unity, all for the glory of God.

Amen.