

Divine Power Divine Wisdom

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[0 : 00] So, Sean's out of town for his two-week vacation for the year. And for those of you who know Sean, he works very, very hard.

So I literally prayed over him last week that he would rest, which seems weird to pray for somebody for a vacation. But he's in Seattle enjoying time off, which is really good. And so I'm preaching this week. I'm Steve, if you don't know me.

I'm on the pastoral leadership team at the church. I'm under evaluation to become a pastor, along with Taryn and Ray, who you saw up front, as well as Matt, who's downstairs helping with the kids. So we'll be filling in for him for the next couple weeks.

So I just want to get my video game illustration out up front and get it over with for those of you that don't like video games. So for those of you who know, I've worked in web technology for the last few years, and video games have been a hobby for me for a long time.

My wife likes to point out that I spend all of my waking hours in front of a screen, which may or may not be true. But for both web technology in general and video games specifically, a really big thing is the next big thing, right?

[1 : 03] Knowing what's going to come and what's going to happen. So, you know, what's going to do well? What will fall flat? 30 years ago, there were a bunch of tech guys sitting around saying, what's this internet thing? Is it going to go well? I don't really know.

Some people said this is useless. It's never going to take off. And here we are today. The modern thing is, you know, what's going to happen with Bitcoin? It keeps going up in price. You know, is that going to go well? Is it going to fall flat?

Everyone's kind of holding their breath. It's fun to speculate on things moving forward. It's kind of funny to look back when people got things wrong. One example of this is from video games in the mid-80s.

Not long after Nintendo, a big video game company, released their first console in North America. It was one of the first systems ever to not use, like, a joystick. If you've ever seen it at the arcades, it used a little directional pad thing, like, up, down, left, right.

And so, you know, one tech columnist seeing this new thing said this. Of the new game systems out, Nintendo's is the worst. The controllers are the most important part of the game system, and Nintendo's controllers are the worst controllers I have ever seen.

[2 : 03] Because there's just such a big shift from what people were used to. So this was written in the mid-80s. By 1990, the worst console had a 90% market share. More households had these consoles than had personal computers at the time.

And Nintendo Corporation surpassed Toyota as the most successful company in Japan. And that controller also became the basic design for every controller, for every video game system from then on. So it's funny to look back and read a column.

I have, like, the screenshot of this column because I thought it was so funny. It's funny to look back and be like, wow, that guy was really wrong in retrospect, right. Looking back, it's really obvious. I think that that's a bit what it's like when you become a Christian, and it's a bit what this passage is about as well.

Before believing in Jesus, Christianity probably seems, like, totally foolish to people. And so maybe even the idea of religion itself looks foolish. But once you become a Christian, your whole mindset changes, and now it looks obvious, right.

Following Jesus seems like the obvious choice at this point. And I think that feeling of, oh, this is obvious now, is tied to verse 25 in the passage, when Paul says, the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

[3 : 07] And he's really saying, you know, to those who don't believe in God, God looks foolish. But sitting on the other side, it's clear that God is the wise one in the situation. And he uses, that's kind of the main thrust of the argument throughout this passage.

And Paul uses a couple arguments to point to this. He says, you know, God's wisdom and power are revealed through two foolish choices, the cross and his people. And that's kind of how Paul structures this argument.

So the first foolish choice that God uses, where he reveals his wisdom, is in the cross. And so in verse 18, Paul says, 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.

And now, just looking back to last week, Paul has just said in verse 17, Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

So that's kind of the lead-in verse. This eloquent wisdom sits in contrast from verse 17 to the word of the cross in verse 18 here, which is displayed as foolishness. And so this is kind of where the illustration of predicting the future rings true, right?

[4 : 11] There are two groups of people here, and one of them are blind to what's coming, the perishing, right? And then there's those who are being saved who see clearly the power of God. And note that both of these are present verbs, right?

You're either in the state of perishing or falling away from God, or you're in the state of being saved, God working in your life. And this is presented as something that's mutually exclusive too, right? There's these two groups of people, and that's all that there is.

Paul frames it this way, I think particularly in context of the Corinthians squabbling over their leaders, right? He's saying, you know, you were saved originally by the cross, and you were being saved, and now you're following down this path that's associated with perishing, right?

Squabbling over leadership. So come back, come back to the cross, come back to what originally saved you. And I think that this is designed both for us and for them as a sense of urgency, right? Which path are you on? You're either being saved or you're perishing. And the choices you make in the way that you live your life aligns you with one or the other of those more. And so Paul's throwing this out here as a warning for people to hear.

[5 : 10] And so the question that comes from this is, why does the cross look foolish, right? If you've grown up in church, maybe it doesn't feel like that. You know, Jesus makes sense. This is what you've heard your entire life. So to explain why the cross is foolish, Paul pulls a verse from Isaiah and then kind of fleshes it out.

And so in verse 19, Paul says, it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Where is the one who's wise?

Where's the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 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. So the answer to why is the cross foolish? It's because God has made foolish the wisdom of the world is what Paul says. In context of Isaiah, where he brings this up, says, you know, I'm destroying the wisdom of the wise. This is a woe passage, one that's predicting judgment upon people. And these people are described in Isaiah as those who give lip service to God, but do not follow him in their hearts.

[6 : 14] And so these people that pose as wise, who speak well, end up having their wisdom, their well-saying destroyed. Here it seems that this judgment is fulfilled, right? So in verse 21, Paul kind of asks the where is, where are these people?

It's sort of like, you know, where, it's sort of mocking almost, like where have they gone? Like the question you ask to someone who loses and in a game, and then you're saying, you know, what happened to you?

Where'd you go? Kind of thing. Like this is over at this point. And so these groups, the question kind of arises, who are the losers from these groups?

Who are the people that have been judged? It seems to be, you know, first, where's the one who's wise? Just kind of generally addressing people considered wise. And then narrowed down to the Jewish and the Greek description of what would be considered wise.

So there's the scribe, who would be like the teacher of the law, someone who would understand the Old Testament extremely well and teach on it. And then there's the debater of the age. So the

philosopher, the sophist, or someone that would contest in the public area and speak wisely. [7 : 19] And it says, you know, has not God made these things foolish, right? That's kind of the breadth of the wisdom of the world. One commentator states, you know, ironically, those who think they are in the know may miss out on the truth in matters theological and ethical, where knowing is less a matter of intellect than of a humble character and pure motives.

And so God subverts the wisdom of the world by making it not just about knowledge, but about character. And so as we look, we note that God has subverted the wisdom of the world, right? This is something I want to point out. It's not like God just said, okay, you know, all these ideas were really smart at one point, and now they're just dumb. I'm just making them this way, and so we're just changing everything. God's not kind of like flattening intelligence to dumbness. He's actually working around the intelligence, the common sense that we have, to say, you know, I'm going to subvert this in a unique way through the message itself. I'm not going to alter the wisdom of the world.

I'm going to show that there is a wiser way, essentially. So this kind of leads to the question, what is the wisdom of the world? Because this is something that's brought up, wisdom's brought up a lot in this passage. It's brought up in the passage before.

[8 : 23] It's brought up after. So if we kind of trace all the points together, verse 17, as I mentioned, Paul contrasts words of eloquent wisdom with preaching of the gospel, and it's contrasted again here in verse 21.

The wisdom of the world's contrasted with the folly of what we preach. And then in chapter two, Paul talks about how he brought about a message in plain words versus in eloquence and sophistication.

So the wisdom of the world seems to be contained in two separate ideas, right? There's the form, like the way that it's presented. It seems to be part of the wisdom of the world. And then there's the content too. There's something uniquely different about the message of the cross and the message of Jesus than what the world teaches.

So looking at the form first, it's quite likely that Paul's taking a swing at like a particular popular rhetorical school at the time, or people that would go up front and speak. And they were called the sophists.

And so they made speaking like an end in itself, as if the phrasing and the words and the way you said things was the art more than the content. Isocrates, who is a Greek philosopher and critic of this school of thought, says this about them.

[9 : 29] They transmit the science of words as simply as they teach the letters of the alphabet without bothering to examine the nature of each kind of knowledge. But thinking that because of this extravagance of their promises, they will command admiration and that teaching of discourse will be held in high esteem.

So because of their flourish and because of the way they present things, that's really what they're aiming for. It reminds me of like the modern TED Talks. I don't know if anyone's seen or watched any TED Talks. Not that TED Talks are bad.

I think that they're well done. But the goal of a TED Talk is more to present an idea that you could find elsewhere in an eloquent and persuasive way to the modern mind. So you could digest it in a textbook or classical literature, but instead there's someone who's gone up and iterated it for you and presents it to you in a really nice package.

Preaching sits in contrast to this mode of speaking. And I think a lot of people today view preaching like a TED Talk or an inspirational speech. And so you might not value it as much as a mode of discourse in itself.

And I've personally thought about it this way previously. Like why does someone come up here? Why do I come up here and just say things to you? Why don't I come up here and just ask questions? Or why doesn't Sean just come up here and ask questions or present ideas and like do a discourse?

[10 : 37] That's a very appealing idea to like our time particularly. One person telling another like what is true about life is not typically how we do things.

We have discussions. We enter into a relationship. Which makes a lot of sense if preaching fits that framework. But the thing is that's not preaching. Preaching is heralding, right? Preaching is the passing on of a message from one person to another.

And so preaching is coming up front to present as accurately as possible the story of Jesus and the Bible and what that means. And so it feels weird and it feels like it doesn't fit in our society.

But I can think of one other role where we actually do want people to come forward and tell the truth consistently, present a story from another angle. And that's journalism, right? When I read a news article, I don't want a slant.

I don't want a hot take. I want the honest truth presented concisely. I'm impressed when a journalist goes and conducts interviews and talks to primary sources and relevant people and comes back and presents it in a digestible format.

[11 : 35] And then I receive that as truth and I say, this is really good, right? Now I feel like I understand the news and what's going on. That's more what preaching's like, right? The idea was that Sean goes and he studies the word or I or whoever's preaching, digs into it, determines the truth, looks at the primary sources and comes and says, this is what God says in his word, right?

Preaching's more like journalism than it is like persuasive discourse. And so I think that that's a small point that Paul's making here when he talks about the folly of preaching versus the wisdom of the world. Another part of this, like I said, is the content of the message, right?

So it's not just the eloquent wisdom versus preaching, it's also through the folly of what we preach. So there's something in the actual words or the message itself that's foolish or considered foolish. And this should feel weird, right? If God is God and Jesus is God and Jesus did amazing things, then it should feel like, you know, why wouldn't the wisest people in the world all equally perceive Jesus as wise, right?

If this is from God. But Jesus literally in Matthew praises the Father in the Gospels saying, Father, you have hidden truth from the wise and revealed it to children, right?

[12 : 50] So what's going on here? Why would it be chosen this way? And I think that this is part of the wisdom of God is that he shows no partiality, right? God is not attained to by human wisdom.

It's by revelation from God. He reveals himself. He shows himself. He calls individual people. And this should be kind of encouraging, right? There's not a level of knowledge that you have to maintain or ascend to or come to to be like, oh, God makes sense now.

Okay, I can be a Christian. And there's not some level of that that you have to continue to maintain while you're a Christian. God is showing no partiality. It's him reaching out to you and revealing truth to you.

To some extent, it is beyond even human reasoning. And so the content of this message that is foolishness to the world is presented in verses 22 through 24.

Paul says, Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

[13 : 52] So the foolishness of the message at its root is Christ crucified, right? This is the stumbling. This is the scandal. This is the foolishness. For the Jews, this would be, you know, a crucified Messiah or a savior or someone that was coming to deliver Israel from oppression makes no sense.

It's an oxymoron. It's a contradiction in terms. For the Greeks, there's actually a famous character, like crucifixion itself was a shameful punishment. There's actually a famous caricature, like drawing, like a comic, almost mocking Christians found in Rome on the Palantine that shows a slave falling down before a crucified donkey under which there are the words, Alex Amenos worships his God, right?

So it was open ridicule to like worship someone who was crucified. That doesn't even make sense. I think it's kind of buffered for us, right? We have like cross necklaces. There's a cross at the front of the church.

Like it's just kind of within the culture. It just stands for Christianity now. So a Christian scholar that I read uses the analogy of picturing like a painting of a concentration camp in a church.

Like that's the sensation and the feeling that's going on, right? We're talking about Christ gas chambered. We're talking about Christ beheaded, right? This is gruesome, gross stuff that feels foolish to the world that makes no sense.

[15 : 07] And so in contrast, right, he's saying here's Christ crucified. This is the meat of the message. He's saying that Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom. And so the sign that in obviously neither of these things are exactly met in Christ up front is what Paul's saying, right?

You know, they demand signs but they get a stumbling block. They demand wisdom but they get foolishness. And so for the Jews, the sign demanding appears to be more of the like, hey, do this and I'll believe you kind of thing than it is like a legitimate request of faith.

And if you look in the Gospels, there's a couple times where Jesus actually refuses to do miracles because of lack of faith. And there are times that God does miracles to restore faith or in answer to prayer. So I'm not saying this covers it entirely but there seems to be some demanding attitude of hey God, if you do this, then I'll follow you and believe you that God does not appreciate because it's almost mocking him.

D.A. Carson, a biblical scholar, describes it this way. The demand for signs becomes the prototype of every condition human beings raise as a barrier to being open to God. I will devote myself to God if he heals my child.

I will follow this Jesus if I can maintain my independence. I will happily become a Christian if God proves himself to me. I will turn from my sin and read the Bible if my marriage gets sorted out to my satisfaction.

[16:26] I will acknowledge Jesus as Lord if he performs the kind of miracle on demand that removes all doubt. In every case, I'm assessing him. He's not assessing me.

I'm not coming to God on his terms. Rather, I'm stipulating terms that he must accept if he wants the privilege of my company. So that's the kind of Jews demanding signs that's going on here.

Similarly, Greek seeking wisdom is sort of a self-justifying seeking of wisdom as well. He describes it, you know, it says, they create entire structures of thought so as to maintain the delusion that they can explain everything.

They think that they are scientific and control, powerful. God, if he exists, must meet the high standards of their academic and philosophical prowess and somehow fit into their system if he is to be given any sort of respectful hearing.

So God, unsurprisingly, does not fit into either of these boxes or demands neatly. And so he becomes a stumbling block to these people. And so you might fit into one of these boxes too.

[17:26] You may, like right now, feel like I could really trust God more if he did one of these specific things for me or answered this prayer that I've really been praying or that I'm leaning into. Or you might be in strong doubt, right?

You say, okay, I found this one intellectual idea and God doesn't meet it and so I can't believe in him until he meets that. And so I see both Christians and people who don't believe in Jesus could fall into this situation.

And there's an encouraging aspect to this, right? If this is you, know that Jesus is not just a difficulty to your system of thought or the way you perceive things. He's also the answer, right?

Paul does not just leave it as, okay, so Christ is foolishness and that's all that there is to say about it. He says at the end of verse 24, to those who are called, Christ is the power of God and Christ is the wisdom of God.

And so it might not be the message that you want to hear or the one that you're bringing to God, but God is approaching you within both power and wisdom, providing a better way, an ultimate satisfaction to what you really want.

[18:29] Tim Keller, who's a pastor in New York, says this about this passage. He says, notice while the gospel offended each culture in somewhat different ways, it also drew people to see Christ and his work in different ways.

Greeks who were saved came to see that the cross was the ultimate wisdom, making it possible for God to be both just and the justifier of those who believe. And Jews who had been saved came to see that the cross was true power.

It meant that our most powerful enemies, sin, guilt, and death itself have been defeated. It is striking then to see how Paul applies the gospel to confront and complete each society's baseline cultural narrative.

He does this both negatively and positively. He confronts each culture for its idols, yet he positively highlights their aspirations and ultimate values. And I think that that saying like, you know, Paul says this, Jesus stands as a front against this part of what you want, but Jesus is also ultimately what you want in himself because he's delivering something even better than you imagined in himself crucified.

And this is why Paul can say in verse 25, the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. God in his wisdom gave the greatest act of power in Jesus'

death and resurrection that sets us free from sin and guilt and shame and the greatest turn of wisdom in offering a relationship directly with himself.

[19 : 50] I don't think that it's, just as a side note, I don't think it should surprise us too much that God, who is a being who created everything and knows everything and is beyond us to an extent, acts in ways that might seem foolish to us, right?

God may not answer directly the demands that we have because we might be the foolish ones. We're the ones sitting without the entire picture. And as a note, I think that this is a framework of the gospel both offending and confirming desires of individuals that fits really well, right?

Like Paul's using Jews and Greeks here to talk about how Christ crucified stands as a front and a comfort to them. But I think of like something that my generation particularly struggles with is, or particularly desires, is the totally autonomous life, right?

These are phrases that I hear regularly. People want to lead a balanced life, plan out career development and map out like a five to ten year plan. Have full flexibility. Live for and only act on the goals that we set for our lives specifically.

Make sure that we're following things that we're passionate about and shed relationships and jobs and anything that stops you from achieving any of those things, right? So that drive for independence is kind of idolized and held high in our culture.

[21 : 02] And I think that some of these things on their own are admirable to an extent. But I picture this verse reading to me, you seek independence but we preach Christ crucified and enslavement to you but to those who are called the true freedom of God.

Jesus does not call us to independence, right? He calls us to dependence on himself. He calls us to give up ourselves and deny ourselves and follow him. And there are things along the way that might not fit exactly with our goals or our passions or what we want to achieve in that moment.

But he gives us more than that. He gives us the ultimate satisfaction that we're desiring out of that, right? He calls us into relationship with himself. He calls us into community. In this, we find freedom in structure, right?

In the structure of church. We find maturity and growth in prayer and the word rather than in our specific development that we've defined. And we find the support and love and purpose and passion that we really want in following after Jesus.

So I think that this, you can think about this in a lot of different ways but our culture will, there will always be something in our culture that is offended by something Jesus has to say but beneath that there will always be an ultimate satisfaction that Jesus has to offer.

[22 : 12] And so hear that today and hear it for what you, if you fall into the camp of, you know, I need God to perform a sign or I need God to fit my intellectual structure or I need God to fit my schedule and my time and my independence.

Hear that Christ is an affront to that but also that he is a satisfaction to that as well. So this is one part of Paul's argument, right? He's saying that the message of the cross subverts human wisdom, right?

It seems foolish but it ultimately gives what we desire. The next example that he uses, he's going through the argument basically of saying world's wisdom is nothing compared to God. He says, oh, you know, a good point of argument would be the Corinthians too.

So he says in verse 26 talking about how God's wisdom is revealed through his people, consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful.

Not many were of noble birth. So I picture Paul like sitting there dictating to a scribe and he's thinking through, okay, so I've got to prove that God works through foolish ways. Okay, so we've talked about the cross. What else can we talk about?

[23 : 11] Oh, you know, the Corinthians, they're kind of morons. I could use them as an example of how God working through foolish things. So I don't think that it's quite that arbitrary of what Paul was going through but it is a bit of an affront, right?

He's coming out and saying, hey, you know, you were not of great means. You were not of noble birth. And I think that from what we can tell in the letter and from context, it's likely that there were like a minority in the church that were powerful, a minority that would fit this description.

It doesn't seem like there were a lot in the church that were absolutely destitute, like in desperate need. But the majority of people would kind of fit the, you know, not very powerful, not super

influential, not from a super notable family.

Just kind of falling into that comfortable middle bucket of lack of worldly influence. And Paul goes on to say that this isn't a bad thing, that this is actually a good thing. And so in verse 27, he says, God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

[24 : 21] And so the first thing to note is that Paul might have actually been kind of underhandedly directing this passage at the people who were something because he's saying that that's not really what matters, right?

And the reason I think this is because the powerful ones seem to be the troublemakers throughout Corinthians. We'll see a few other issues come up where believers are taking each other to court in chapter six.

There seems to be this group of stronger believers who are like strong-arming weaker believers in chapters eight through ten in regards to eating meat offered to idols. Paul chastises some believers for eating too much of communion essentially and leaving others hungry in chapter 11.

These are all probably directed at people who are powerful enough to do those things, to bring people to court, to bring their own food and eat whatever they want to. And so this passage is a reminder to level the playing field for the ones who are better off, right?

God has chosen specifically the weak and the poor and the things that are nothing to shame the rich and the wise. And keep in mind that God has regularly chosen those of lower regard to do his work.

[25 : 22] I feel like our series in Genesis showed this week in and week out. It was often the discussion of, well, there's this older sibling and they should have gotten the power and the respect, but actually the younger sibling got it.

Or, you know, there's this great person over here that could have done good things, but instead this person who really messed up a lot ends up being really important. And so this is kind of God's MO, right?

This is how he works typically. And let me not mince words here, right? I'm not talking just about like spiritual poverty. I think there's a fine line to walk here. I think that some people will say, oh, like the poor by material poverty are saved, right?

I don't think that that's right. I don't think that that's something that our church particularly struggles with. I think that when we sit in a more affluent area, it's easier to say, oh, God's just talking about spiritual poverty in a poor in spirit aspect.

I think that there's some real status going on here. I think of just with Christmas coming up soon, I was thinking of the Magnificat that Mary speaks. It's in Luke 1, and I'll just read a few verses from it, where Mary praises God for giving her Jesus.

[26 : 29] And she says this inside of this prayer. He has shown strength with his arm, speaking of God. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.

He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever.

And I think that the framework that's given in the Bible regularly for people that are well off and of good means is to be extremely generous. Zacchaeus, the second he becomes a Christian, goes and not only doubly repays everyone that he's ever offended, but gives away a lot of his money as well.

Joseph of Arimathea gives his entire tomb for Jesus' burial, a very luxurious gift. The believers in Jerusalem, when they become a church at first, they all sell all the extra things that they have so that they can give to the poor in their midst.

There's a real framework where the poverty and being of lesser means is a way that God is literally working to fulfill his glory. And so hear that as we look at this passage.

[27 : 36] God's using those that are foolish, those that are weak, those that are low, and he's using them specifically to shame those who oppose him and who are in a higher position. Keep in mind that, you know, the whole, this whole first chapter of Corinthians, the Corinthians who are lower are kind of latching onto these leaders and saying, you know, I follow Apollos, I follow Paul.

They're siphoning some wisdom and power off of who they follow, basically. They're trying to scramble through this rat race of becoming something better. And so Paul is warning them, basically, like, hey, just so you know, that's exactly what God is targeting and bringing to nothing. So if you're trying to climb up this ladder of wisdom and influence and being something, that's who God's going after in this instance. So you might want to move out of the way. I feel like climbing the ladder is an easy game to play both inside and outside of the church, right, of, like, trying to gain social influence and power and wealth and whatever it might be.

It's an extremely freeing game not to play, too, just as a note. I'd say thinking, like, inside of the church, one of the biggest dangers as regards status is it's a place you can come and siphon off affections of people, basically, by making yourself useful.

So I think of this particularly because we're a church plant and church plants have a ton of volunteers, essentially. A lot of people here do a lot of stuff for the church and I'm super thankful for that. But I'll just use myself as an example of things I've done at the church.

[28 : 57] You know, I've helped make administrative decisions. I've done Sunday morning setup and help with sound some. I lead a small group. I've literally been part, I was just thinking of this, I've literally been part of this church longer than anyone here because Sean's not here right now and we were the first two couples to meet.

So there's a lot of places I can just pat myself on the back, right? And it's easy for me to slip from showing up to worship God to showing up to feel good about myself for what I've done and what I can do and what this church means to me and the things that I've poured into it and all of a sudden it's about me.

Not only can this lead to division and me being bitter against people who might step into something that I was doing before or, you know, the church growing, there's a million things I can think of ways that could go wrong for someone who has helped out.

It also literally, you know, if I'm scrambling that ladder, like if I view those things in that way, I'm literally putting myself in the target sights of God, right? I'm asking to be brought to nothing because God is saying this is how I'm working.

I love all the volunteers here, like literally I love all of you, but I honestly think that part of keeping each other accountable here is watching for over ownership and being willing to call each other on it. I don't want anyone here to literally be on the path to perishing because they're serving church too much, right?

[30 : 07] That's absolutely ridiculous. And I don't want anyone here to feel overly burdened either. This passage is freeing. There's no ladder to climb in church. Don't feel that way. Everything you do here is a reflection on God, not on yourself.

If you feel like, like honestly, if you're helping out with church and you feel like you're overly burdened or something's going wrong or like you feel that, like come talk to me or Taryn afterwards and we'll pray for you and we'll talk with you because we don't want you to be in that position. We want church to be a place where you come to worship God and we want you to be free of anything like that that's dragging you down. Outside of church, I mean, there's plenty of places to climb for status and influence and wealth and for many of us, like we have to play that game to some extent, right?

Like I have to do well at my job so that I can get a raise so that I can provide for my family as prices go up around me. So these need to be goals for those of us who need income.

I totally get that. The passage gives freedom though and maybe even responsibility to not seek these things as an end in and of themselves. So I'd encourage you, if you feel like you're exhausted from working and you don't know why or you're chasing excellence at work or like chasing a promotion or a new position and you don't like have a reason, like you haven't really thought through it or if that reason is, oh yeah, I want to look good for people or I want to make a lot of money, be wary, right?

[31 : 23] You may have fallen into the trap of seeking wisdom and power in the world's eyes. That's not what's going to save you at the end of the day even if it feels like it in the moment when you're putting in the extra hours at work.

What saves us at the end of the day is not this social status but Jesus, right? Paul says in verse 30, because of him you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

And so Paul literally says in this verse, you know, social status, he matches wisdom, influence, noble birth, and replaces it with three things in Christ. He says righteousness, redemption, and sanctification, and the wisdom of living in God versus the foolishness of chasing after social status. And these three words kind of encapsulate all the blessings of being in Christ, the things that we get when we're saved by him. So righteousness is looking at legal justification, right standing before God, that we're able to stand in him, not accused of anything essentially, because Christ has taken our sins upon himself.

Sanctification is talking about being holy and set apart, like the ability to approach God in the first place. That we are pure and clean and not going to be smited down instantly for being unclean and approaching him.

[32 : 33] And then redemption is being brought out of a bad situation into a good one. When you redeem something, if you redeem time or you redeem a situation, you're saying, you know, this was going really poorly, but I've adjusted this and now it's going well.

And that's something that we experience in Jesus, right? He turns our lives around. So the whole point of this is that our value is not in what we do, right? Our original value, but in what Christ has done, right?

It's not in the social status we gain, but in what Christ has provided for us in his wisdom. Ben Witherington, who's an ancient Near Eastern scholar, notes that this chapter basically calls us to evaluate our entire value system that we live with implicitly.

What, you know, the question basically is what do we do, or the question for each of us is, you know, what do I do specifically because I'm a Christian and what am I doing just because it's part of the culture and I haven't even stopped to think about it before.

It's just how I've lived, how I've been raised, whatever that looks like. He says this, or Ben Witherington says this, Paul requires that we ask how much of our sense of self-worth and identity is grounded in our culture's evaluation of us in terms of wealth, education, and the like, and how much of it is grounded in our identity as sinners saved by grace.

[33 : 42] It also requires us to ask how much of our values in life, what we really long for, are dictated by culture and how much by the gospel. Christian attitudes about wealth, family, country, and other things held dear are often more grounded in certain cultural assumptions than any Christian teaching.

Demographic studies of Christian congregations show that race, class, occupation, and numerous other factors often determine where one goes to worship. Whatever else one might say about Corinthian Christianity, it was not ethnically, racially, sexually, or socially monochrome.

And so, Witherington and Paul are asking the hard questions here. Why do I go to church? Am I at church just because I was raised that way? Is it because it's comfortable or a habit for me?

Or am I here because I really think that my value is in Jesus Christ? What about political views? What are those influenced by? How about I handle my money? Who I spend my time with? Are these things influenced by my social background and standing or by Jesus?

And I think that the Bible as a whole helps us walk through and discern those things. And I think that the believers that you're sitting around help you walk through and discern those things. I think that's part of why community group and discussion are important because you sit together and you flesh out things with people that don't have the same experience as you or the same background as you and you answer questions and you work through the word together and you disciple one another.

[35 : 00] And I, like, there's no way for me to give all the answers about all these things right now and I don't think I have all the answers about most of these things. But I think that this passage does a good job raising the question of where are you really getting what you think from?

What's, you know, cultures like swimming and fish in water, right? Fish don't realize that they're in water. It's just the air around them. What are you swimming in and are you aware of it and where does it come from? You know, this passage doesn't really stop there and Witherington's commentary on it doesn't either.

He says, once we realize that we're living for a different value system, we'll see an area where we, just like the message of Christ, contrast with the culture, right? Being the life of living as a Christian will naturally be an offense at some points and an encouragement at some points to the culture around us too.

There were consequences of Christ crucified to these Corinthians. Lays it out this way. It threatened to level a carefully built up system of social stratification not only by creating a new diverse

community but also by refusing to participate in certain parts of the old social system in crucial ways.

So Corinthian Christians wouldn't participate in pagan worship which was pretty much mandatory and they wouldn't participate in the military. An early Christian apologist, Minucius Felix, I haven't read that out loud yet, that's interesting, expressed the average Roman citizens view of a Christian this way.

[36 : 15] You do not go to our shows, right? So a Roman would say to a Christian, you don't go to our shows, you don't take part in our processions, you're not present at our public banquets and you shrink in horror from our sacred games, right?

So there are going to be areas where you living as a Christian are going to rub up against the people around you. I know that people in our church for a fact have disrupted their social status in the name of Jesus, right? They have not showed up at particular work parties where they knew things were going to get too crazy.

They've quit jobs that have demanded idolatrous amounts of work. They've turned down crass talk and gossip when everyone else around them is doing it. They've taken time to rest personally or taken time to care for family when they could be taking time to climb the social ladder of status, right?

And I want to encourage you that every time you make one of those choices that God sees that, right? God sees that and it's for his glory in that moment and that's the thing that you're living for. You're living for the status of being in Christ and the freedom that's in that rather than social status. And so I think that's why he says in verse 31, you know, as it is written, let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.

[37 : 18] This is a reference to Jeremiah 9, 23 through 24, which I'll read because it matches this passage so closely. I think Paul's taking some ideas from it. Jeremiah says, thus says the Lord, thus says the Lord, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.

For in these things I delight, declares the Lord. I don't particularly love sports illustrations for church, mostly because they're overused and usually they're not directly applicable, but this one's perfect and it fits really well, right?

Whenever I think of boasting in the biblical sense, I think of cheering for a sports team, right? So when you align yourself so closely with a sports team that you say we won when the team wins at the end of the day, you know you had nothing to do with that, right?

They won. You watched and yelled really loudly at your TV. You're fully aware you didn't contribute at all but you revel in that victory anyways because it's so exciting to you because you've aligned yourself so closely, right?

That's the sensation of this passage as well. We boast in God when we acknowledge Christ crucified, right? It's his power and Jesus' salvation is our wisdom and status. When we align so closely with these things that are foolish to the world, we're just, we rejoice in them.

[38 : 39] So if you're not a Christian today, maybe you're a skeptic, maybe you're not sure what you believe, maybe you realize you've been going to church for a while and you're not sure why you're here, you know, Jesus being God who died, this Christ crucified, should be your main holdup.

That's what I would advise you on, right? If you're considering Christianity, consider this, consider that Jesus is Lord and Savior and whether that's true or not. There are a lot of other questions around religion and faith and Christianity and I totally acknowledge that and I'd love to discuss some of those with you but I think if you, the hardest thing you're ever going to wrestle with is that Jesus is Lord, right?

He's a God who died and rose again and believing in him is essential to your life and if you can wrestle with that, a lot of the other questions that you have are going to fall into line because a lot of them are tied back to that, honestly.

And so if that's where you're at, like I'm happy to talk with you, I'm happy to pray with you. I know Taryn and others here are happy to talk as well. You can just turn to the person next to you probably and strike up the conversation. I'd encourage you to really laser in on that, right?

That's going to be the stumbling block for anyone who's not a Christian yet. That's going to be the hardest part, I guarantee it. If you are a Christian, I want to give you encouragement here to end. This doesn't hinge on you, right?

[39 : 47] That's the whole point of this passage. All this does not depend on you. Your value and worth is in Jesus himself, right? He is your wisdom and your power, not your own wisdom or your own status, right?

You're not living this life to make yourself look good. You're living this life to make Jesus look good and he's working through you. And so find rest and assurance in that today. Let me pray for us. Lord, we thank you that you are our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. And Lord, we thank you that we live to boast in you and not in ourselves. And Lord, I just pray that you would strip back the ways that we do boast in ourselves.

Lord, it feels good in the moment but it's ultimately just a weight on us that drags us down where we have to pridefully prove ourselves again and again. And Lord, I just pray that you would set specific people even in this church today free of that.

Lord, that we would come to points where we boast in the Lord more and in ourselves less today. We pray these things in your name, Amen. Thank you.