

**United in Christ: Overcoming the Challenges of Diversity
Studies in 1 Corinthians
Why God Acted as He Did**

Intro: In our studies so far we have discovered that the essential problem of the Corinthians was division centered in personal self-promotion and pride. The contest about who was the greater Christian was inseparably tied to the discussion of who was the greater teacher. And the criterion for greatest teacher was the cultural standard of human wisdom or rhetorical skill. All of that left the Corinthians bantering with one another with assertions of superiority like “*I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, and I am of Christ.*”

Paul’s initial response to their divisions was simple and forthright:

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Cor. 1:10)

He reminds them that the source of their unity was Christ. He was the one who was crucified for them; He was the one in whose name they were baptized. He was the one in whose body they were united.

But the Corinthians’ divisions reflected a fundamental lack of understanding as to how God accomplished mankind’s salvation (1:18-25), why He acted as He did (1:26-31), and why Paul had preached as he did (2:1-5).

The Corinthians were attracted to human wisdom; but God chose to save mankind by a message that human wisdom could have never conceived and which the wise of this world considered foolishness. Now let’s hear Paul as he enlarges upon this and explains to us why God has acted the way he has.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 1:26-31)

Paul reminds the Corinthians of how God works

How and through whom God works is a matter of His choice

Notice Paul’s repetition of the phrase “God has chosen.”

God has no obligation to act on our terms or according to our expectations. He is the creator and we are the creation.

God has chosen to bring about man’s salvation through means contrary to human wisdom and values.

In this world if you want to get something done, to whom would you turn? Typically the answer would be:

Intellectuals because they are presumably the wisest of men
Politicians because they are presumably the most powerful of men.

The noble because they are the wealthiest of men.

This is how the system of the world thinks and works.

Yet God chose to bring about salvation in an entirely different way. He did not gather the intellectuals, the powerful, and the rich to resolve the problem of man's sin. Instead he chose to bring it about Himself by means unattractive to the wise, the powerful, and the noble.

The foolish thing, the weak thing, the base thing may be a reference to the cross which could find no place of honor in the world's value system.

God will save the world by a condemned criminal? To the intellectual this was foolishness!

God will save the world through a man so weak, he couldn't save himself? To the powerful this was incredible.

God would use a man with no status or standing in society to deliver it from its problems? To the noble this was preposterous.

This could simply be verified by looking at the makeup of the Corinthian church.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; In Corinth the gospel had made little inroads into the community of the wise, the wealthy, and the powerful. Instead it appealed to those who would have been considered foolish, weak, and base by the wise, powerful, and noble.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of why God worked that way

God deliberately chose to bring about man's salvation in a way that results in man's shame or humiliation rather than his boasting.

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There is no room in the gospel for self-congratulation. We are not saved because we were smart enough to figure it out, powerful enough to pull ourselves out of our plight, or wealthy enough to buy ourselves out of sins.

God deliberately chose to bring about man's salvation in a way that brings glory to Him, not man.

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that,

just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Cor. 1:26-31)

Here Paul quotes from that great passage in Jer. 9 where God urges ancient Israel to see that their deliverance was not based on their wisdom, their power, or their money; but upon their relationship with Him!

Thus says the Lord, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

And so Paul likewise urges the Corinthians to humble themselves and recognize that if they have any reason to boast, it is not in what they were, what they had, or what they had done, but in the Lord who had saved them. Paul surely had gotten the message and said it beautifully in Gal. 6:14:

But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 6:14)

In Christ there is no grounds for boasting except in what the Lord has done for us.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of what they have through God's work

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption... (1 Cor. 1:26-31)

By whose doing had the Corinthians become what they were? The answer, "His doing!" But don't we have "do" something to be saved? Yes, but whatever we may do in response to the gospel is really the result of what God did first. Without what He did; there would be no human doing.

God's work joins us to Christ and accomplishes four important things to those who believe:

It makes us wise! It gives us understanding that we could have in no other way.

It makes us right! It results in the forgiveness of our sins!

It makes us holy! It changes us into people God can use!

It makes us free! It delivers us from slavery to sins power and consequences.

The meaning and application of Paul's message

How does this paragraph speak to the Corinthian problem?

The Corinthians had used human wisdom, especially the power of rhetoric, to exalt one teacher over another and consequently themselves over one another.

The Corinthians have used a tool for establishing their superiority as disciples that God did not use in making them disciples! God did not make use of human wisdom, power, or wealth to save them. Why should they exalt themselves on the basis of such things? Instead of boasting about who taught them, they needed to boast about who saved them.

How does this paragraph speak to the modern disciple?

The gospel still doesn't make many inroads into the communities of the intellectual, the powerful, and the noble. Most of us came from "the other side of the tracks."

Such a realization should cause us to be humble toward one another and toward the lost.

It should cause us to glorify God for all that we are and all that we have.

It should cause us to be unified in Christ.

Conclusion: God saved mankind in a way that was not flattering to man. He did so in order that He might receive the glory and we might benefit from humbly walking before Him. That message is as needed now as ever!