

INTRODUCE

Good morning church! I'm Chris Martin, if I haven't met you yet.

As a part of our 5 year birthday, or anniversary, or whatever you call it, I want to talk about the church, but I didn't just want it to be me talking, so I've asked a few folks to share a few minutes each about what the church has meant to them. So, first up, please welcome Becky Veith.

BECKY VEITH

NATE WERTZ

NISSA MORAIS

Ok, hey let's thank these three one more time.

- Statistically, people rank the fear of public speaking
- above the fear of death.
- So, like Jerry Seinfeld says,
- most people at a funeral would rather be the guy in the box
- than the guy giving the eulogy.

Good job you all!

BIBLES

Ok, if you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. 1 Corinthians 1. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible, so if you don't have one, grab one of the hard-backed black one under every chair. You can open your phone or tablet. 1 Corinthians 1.

If you open a black one from under your chair, 1 Corinthians is on page 952.

INTRODUCTION

So, Paul's start to this letter has been fascinating.

- It's to the church he had planted approximately 5 years earlier...
- so, this church is actually in a similar life stage to Fathom.
- Still pretty new.
- Filled with a lot of young Christians,
- many of whom had been saved out of the Greek culture.

But it had been reported to him,

- that there were divisions happening in the church,

They were letting the movement called Sophistry influence the church. And remember,

- Sophistry was a philosophical movement that
- cared more about being entertained,
- than with knowing the truth.

So, this church seemed to start to care

- more about style than substance.
- More about eloquence than content.
- More about entertainment than truth of the Gospel.

And so, what does Paul do?

- He reminds them that the wisdom of the world,
- when put up against the wisdom of God
- shown in the death of Jesus on the cross,
- is foolish.

Paul is essentially calling them back to the true Gospel by saying,

- *“Your great desire to be entertained...*
- *but lack of desire for the truth.*
- *It’s foolish!*
- *Return to the word of the cross.*
- *Choose substance over style.*
- *Remember the cross.”*

TRANSITION

So, his argument started with the foolishness of the cross. That was last week. This week he moves to the church, and argues the foolishness of the church.

Look at verse 26:

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26a

[26] For consider your calling, brothers:

EXPLAIN: CALLING

Now, stop right there. Paul is picking up on a theme that runs through the first chapter of his letter, and that is that the men and women in the church are called people. He's mentioned *calling* four times already.

And, remember, God calling you was an act purely on the basis of grace.

- You weren't called because you were good people...
- or because you were successful...
- or because you were moral...
- or because you had some sort of 'x factor'
- that made you worthy of calling.

There was no human standard by which someone was called. You were just called.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26

[26] For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

Is this supposed to be encouraging? He says,

- *"Consider your calling (which you did nothing to merit)..."*
- *you're not all that smart...*
- *you haven't accomplished a whole lot...*
- *and you don't really come from the right pedigree."*

Thanks Paul! That's really encouraging!

This isn't like our culture

- where everyone is a skittle
- and a snowflake
- and you can do anything you set your mind to!

But there is something going on behind the text that we need to know.

Paul is speaking into the class structure in the Greco-Romans world, specifically in the city of Corinth.

EXPLAIN: AMERICAN CLASSES

When we think about classes in American society, we primarily think in terms of socioeconomics. Right? Now, there is a lot to take into consideration when it comes to race, and location, etc. But we primarily divide over money! Economics.

So, the U.S. Census bureau defines 5 classes:

- 'Lower Class' are part time or unemployed persons.
- The 'Working Class' are service and blue-collar workers.
- The 'Lower Middle Class' are professional support and sales.
- 'Upper Middle Class' are professionals.
- And 'Upper Class' are CEOs, etc.

And the United States has prided itself in having a strong middle class, with fewer lower-class members or upper-class members. But class has mostly been defined by socioeconomics in our culture.¹

EXPLAIN: CORINTHIAN CLASSES

But class in the first-century Greco-Roman world was much more complex and nuanced. So, your class was based on things like:

- your ancestry,
- your census rank based on wealth and political privilege,
- your family honors,
- and varying grades of citizenship.
- Additionally, there were also slaves all throughout the empire,
- and also a class of former slaves known as Freedmen.

And unless something quite exceptional happened to an individual,

- persons living in this era did not rise up the social ladder
- but remained within the confines of the social class
- in which they were born.
- In fact, a famous phrase in Greco-Roman culture was
- *'whatever one's rank, it must be maintained.'*ⁱⁱ

Well, Corinth, when it was established as a Roman colony, was populated with primarily Freedmen from the Roman Empire. Former slaves who had been freed.

EXPLAIN: FREEDMEN

Now, freedmen were one step above the slave class, and although they were very unlikely to move up in social standings, these freedmen were upwardly mobile like they hadn't been as slaves.

- They could become merchants,
- or artisans,

- or entrepreneurs.
- And they had the ability to earn immense wealth and success...
- especially in a city like Corinth.

But, a freedman who became rich and influential might still be looked down on by the traditional aristocracy as what they called ‘new money’.ⁱⁱⁱ

So, to compensate, many aspired to increase their social standing in a never-ending pursuit of social honor. Not unlike the American narrative of the self-made-man.

APPLICATION

So, Paul is reminding them of where they came from.

- If they were to take stock of themselves
- and their fellow church members,
- they would readily recognize that most, if not all,
- do not fall into the category of “the cream of the crop.”

Paul’s command that they consider their calling suggests that some Corinthian believers may have forgotten their humble estate.^{iv}

Verse 27:

1 CORINTHIANS 1:27-28

[27] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,

EXPLAIN: CHOSE

And I just love this statement: **God chose!** This is the antithesis to a status-based class worthy of boasting and honor.

- God chose the weak...
- NOT to make them strong,
- NOT to help them move into the ranks,
- NOR to begin a new class struggle...
- but to subvert, invert, and convert human values.

Now, were the members of the church actually foolish, weak, and low? Well, in some ways, yes, but again, remember the rhetoric that Paul is leaning into here.

He says:

- **God chose the foolish because the wise thought the cross was moronic.**
- **God chose the weak because the strong thought they were powerful enough without God.**
- **God chose the low and despised because the high and mighty did not want to associate themselves with a crucified God.**

ILLUSTRATION: BIBLE CHARACTERS

And God does this all throughout the Bible. God consistently chooses the most unlikely figures. A friend of mine does this thing where he goes through Bible characters and decides if his church would hire them...

I mean, think about it...you're in the interview:

- *“Oh, the Apostle Paul.*
 - *So, I see here on your resume that you were a pharisee of pharisees...impressive.*
 - *In your 20s you rose to a very high position of influence in the Sanhedrin. Wow.*
 - *You studied under Gamaliel? What’s he like? Very exciting.*
 - *Now, I do see this small note here about you playing a role in the imprisonment and killing of Christians.*
 - *Surely that’s a typo? Is that correct? Yes?*
 - *Yeah, I’m not sure you’re gonna be a fit in Kid’s Ministry.”*
- *Or King David,*
 - *“Yeah, thanks for coming in for a second interview Dave.*
 - *Man, that demo tape of your harp playing was legit.*
 - *And the fact that you wrote most of the Psalms certainly qualifies you to do some worship song-writing for us.*
 - *And no one doubts your charisma and passion.*
 - *I mean, dancing around in your underwear won’t fly here,*
 - *but if we can reign that in,*
 - *I think it might be a fit.*
 - *Only thing is, you seem to have some woman problems...*
 - *Like, you sleep around a bit...*
 - *Is that still a struggle for you?*
 - *Yeah, I’m not sure the women in our church are gonna be comfortable with you as our new worship leader.”*

- *“Peter, we’d like you as our new pastor,*
 - *I mean, you were one of Jesus’ best friends.*
 - *But there are a few things we need to ask you about:*
 - *you confessed Jesus as the Christ. That’s good.*
 - *But then a minute later he called you Satan...not so good.*
 - *And on his last night you said you’d never abandon him,*
 - *but then when he was arrested,*
 - *you denied even knowing him?*
 - *And then, we just interviewed this guy for our kid’s ministry, Paul, you know him?*
 - *Well, he said you struggled with racism...*
 - *I don’t know if we can handle all these ups and downs.”*

It’s silly, but seriously, we wouldn’t hire most of the heroes of the Bible!

But God chose them. And Paul is saying that God is continuing to do that very thing in Corinth.

TRANSITION

So, God chooses the foolish, the weak, and the lowly. Not because they are inherently better or worse than others, but because there is a character trait that is needed to be a true follower of Christ. And what is that trait?

Well, that leads us to verse 29:

1 CORINTHIANS 1:29

[29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

EXPLAIN: HUMILITY

God's ultimate goal

- in choosing the foolish, weak, and despised
- was not simply to shame the wise and strong,
- but to prevent all human boasting.

One scholar puts it like this: God eliminates all human boasting by *“conferring his salvation on those who are too foolish, weak, and contemptible, and hence too humble, to take any credit for their new exalted position in Christ.”*^v

The character trait needed to be a true follower of Christ is

SLIDE HUMILITY. True wisdom is built upon the foundation of humility.

Now, humility is kinda a tricky thing.

- Cause, can you know that you're humble?
- Like, if you know you are humble, are you actually humble?

So, if you say,

- *“Yeah, I feel like God has really been growing me significantly*
- *in the area of humility...*
- *and I'm just becoming WAY more humble!”*
- Are you?
- Like, did you just brag about being humble?

Like, I'm not sure you can even know if you're humble.

And the opposite of humility it is pride, and that's tricky as well.

- Because no one who's prideful thinks they're prideful!
- They just think they're awesome!
- "I'm not prideful, I just think I do most things better than most people!"

See, this is tricky.

So, let me give us three ways we pursue humility...not boasting in anything but Jesus. And I straight stole these from Matt Chandler, but I think they're helpful.

HUMILITY: WEAKNESS

First, we **SLIDE ACKNOWLEDGE OUR WEAKNESS**. We acknowledge our weakness. I mean, this is all that Paul is trying to do in this passage. He's trying to remind the church that they weren't all that! This is unbelievably important!

ILLUSTRATION

So, many of you know that my wife Maryse has suffered from some long-term health issues for more than a decade. And there have been some ups and downs throughout the years, but for most of our marriage, I felt like I was the strong one.

- When she didn't feel well, and needed me to step up, I did so.
- There were bad seasons where she wouldn't be able to get up from the couch or bed much,

- and so, I would work at the church,
- and then clean the house,
- and then care for Harper,
- and then go to the grocery store.

And the Lord did a lot in my selfish heart through that, teaching me about how to love and care and serve.

But it also produced something in my heart that wasn't good.

- I think I saw myself as the rock.
- I saw myself as the strong one in our marriage.
- And under the surface,
- I believed that it was my strength
- that kept things afloat.
- That's pride.

Now, 2019 came around,

- and it was not a good year for me.
- I burnt out...
- well, really flamed out...
- and it felt as if my life came crashing down around me.

And, I remember just driving my car around,

- aimlessly,
- freaking out...
- not sure where to go...
- not sure what to do.

And I called Maryse, and she just said, “*Come to me.*” And so, I went to her.

And listen, for the next few months, I had nothing to give.

- Emotionally.
- Spiritually.
- Relationally.
- And she was my rock.
- And she was strong.
- And God blessed me by reminding me of my weakness.

We acknowledge our weaknesses. **This should set you free!**

- You don’t have to DO everything.
- You don’t have to BE everything.
- We acknowledge our weakness.

HUMILITY: DON’T KNOW

Second, we **SLIDE ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT WE DON’T KNOW.**

This means we stay hungry to keep learning and growing. Learning in and of itself is somewhat a medicine against pride. Ok? The tendency as we get older and learn more, is to get crusty, and set-in-our-ways, and less curious.

Goodness, as you get older,

- you shouldn’t become a know-it-all,
- instead you should become a
- knows-I’m-not-a-know-it-all.
- Right?

Sadly, many of us, as we get older,

- grow less and less humble in what we know.
- Many become less curious to learn and grow and be developed
- And we often think we are the teachers...
- never the learners.
- This is pride.

HUMILITY: STRENGTHS

And third, we **SLIDE ACKNOWLEDGE THE STRENGTHS OF OTHERS.**

We celebrate and delight in the strengths and successes of others.

We don't play the perennial critic.

Maryse and I heard this somewhere, and we've tried to put it into practice, but **we want to become experts in each other's strengths, not just keenly aware of each other's weaknesses.**

Now, knowing weakness is a big deal, right? I just said you need to acknowledge where you are weak. But in our society, it is way easier to be aware of everyone else's weaknesses, and never focus on their strengths and gifts.

ILLUSTRATION: OLYMPICS

This will become acute this summer, with the Olympics happening. So, here's how it will play out. Maryse and I will watch the gymnastics? And it's unbelievable to see what those athletes can do! Right?

- But after the routines,
- no matter how great they were,
- the commentators on the tv will always have
- some sort of criticism and reasons
- why they should be “shaving” points off their scores.

And as I watch more, I’ll start to see some of the flaws, and I’ll start saying,

- *“Oh, that dismount is going to hurt her score,”*
 - or,
- *“his toes weren’t pointed all the way through that flip.”*

Like I know anything!

- I’m laying on my couch,
- with a bag of Doritos on my chest,
- and crumbs everywhere.
- Criticizing these incredible athletes.

Now, this example is silly,

- **but always pointing out the flaws in others...**
- **never focusing on their strengths...**
- **never celebrating their victories.**
- **What arrogance!**

TRANSITION

So, we acknowledge our weaknesses, what we don’t know, and the strengths of others. That’s humility.

Now, let’s finish the passage. Verse 30:

1 CORINTHIANS 1:30-31

[30] And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, [31] so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

CONCLUSION

And those first words of verse 30... **And because of HIM.**

- Because of God.
- It's because of him...
- that you are in Christ Jesus.
- It's not on you!
- It's not in your awesomeness!
- That's why it's completely asinine
- to boast in anything but the Lord.

This is the folly of the church.

The foolishness is the fact that THIS ROOM is what God has chosen.

- Look around. Ok.
- This is God's BEST plan!
- You think, "Maybe He could've come up with a better plan!"
- Well, he didn't.
- This seems foolish!
- But it's the wisdom of God.

It may not be a socioeconomic thing...or a class thing...but you know the baggage you bring into this thing. You know you...

And listen to me church, not many of you were wise or powerful or noble. But God chose you. And I've told you again and again in our first five years together: God didn't make a mistake when he chose you.

- Jesus knew what he was buying on the cross,
- and there has been no buyer remorse.

ILLUSTRATION: CAR FAX

I've used the illustration of a CarFax...it's like God ran a Carfax on you, and got the report back and it was not good.

- Broken.
- Been in an accident.
- Leaks oil.
- DO NOT BUY THIS CAR!

But he got the report, and yet he is not looking to return it to the dealership and go,

- *"Hey, you sold me a lemon!*
- *This one is broken.*
- *I didn't see it before.*
- *It looked really pretty on the lot.*
- *And then I got it home*
- *and this thing fell off...*
- *this started smoking.*
- *And I don't want it anymore."*

No! He knew what he was getting.

- He knows we stumble and bumble.
- He knows we're fools.
- He chose you!

The message to us, over and over again is this:

- *"I chose you. Yeah you fell down. Get up.*
- *I've got you. I knew this was coming. Get up.*
- *I paid for that. Yeah, you blew it. Now get back up.*
- *I've covered that with my blood.*
- *Yeah, you got confused again.*
- *Yeah, you let pride creep in again.*
- *I know; I paid for that. Now get up.*
- *Let's keep going. I'll get you there."*

So, let's play. Let's do this. We are low and despised and foolish...but God has chosen us. So, let's boast in our great God.

What a foolish wisdom God has displayed in choosing us, church.

Five years. What will the next hold?

Let's pray.

COMMUNION

We respond in 4 ways:

- Communion
- Tithes & offerings
- Prayer
- Singing

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” [25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” [26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

ⁱ <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-sociology/chapter/the-class-structure-in-the-u-s/>

ⁱⁱ R.C. Beacham, Spectacle Entertainments of Early Imperial Rome.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedman>

^{iv} David Garland, 1 Corinthians.

^v T.B. Savage, Power through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians.