Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Conversions of the Rich and Famous
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1
Code: BQ051712

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, (1:26—27)

Paul possibly went over the membership of the Corinthian church in his mind as he wrote verse 26. He reminded them that they had very few who were famous, wealthy, highly educated, powerful, or influential when they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is likely that, when they became Christians, they lost a great deal of the prestige, influence, and income they did have. **Consider your calling, brethren,** he says. Paul always uses the term calling to refer to the saving call of God, the effectual call that results in redemption. “You know what sort of persons you were when God called you out of darkness. You know that He did not accept you as His child because you were brilliant or wealthy or intelligent or powerful. If you were any of these things,” he says, “you were saved in spite of them not because of them. If anything they were stumbling blocks that hindered you, obstacles between you and God’s grace.” He implies that they should be *glad* that **not many** were **wise according to the flesh** or **mighty** or **noble**. Such things often keep people from the sense of need that leads to salvation. If more of them had been **wise, mighty,** or **noble,** it is likely that fewer of them would have been saved.

God is not looking for Phi Beta Kappas to save and to do His work. Nor is He looking for millionaires or famous athletes or entertainers or statesmen. His salvation is open to them just as surely as to others, but only on the same basis of faith. The very things that put them ahead in the world may actually put them behind with God. It is the feeling of inadequacy that makes people aware that they have need, and often draws them to the gospel.

Jesus prayed on one occasion, “I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes” (Matt. 11:25). As the context makes clear, this prayer was spoken publicly as a part of His preaching to the crowds. He was addressing His hearers as much as His Father when He prayed these words. He wanted them to know that God wanted only their faith and nothing else. He was also warning that “the wise and intelligent” were at a disadvantage as far as spiritual life and understanding are concerned. It is not

that they could not accept and believe, but that pride in and dependence on their accomplishments and abilities could keep them from the kingdom. Weakness and insufficiency are the climate in which God's strength is made manifest.

God's wisdom is a kind of paradox. In human thinking, strength is strength, weakness is weakness, and intelligence is intelligence. But in God's economy some of the seemingly strongest things are the weakest, some of the seemingly weakest things are the strongest, and some of the seemingly wisest things are the most foolish. The paradox is not by accident but by God's design.

A simple, uneducated, untalented, and clumsy believer who has trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior and who faithfully and humbly follows His Lord is immeasurably wiser than the brilliant Ph.D. who scoffs at the gospel. The simple believer knows forgiveness, love, grace, life, hope, God's Word—God Himself He can see eternity. The unbelieving Ph.D., on the other hand, knows nothing beyond his books, his own mind, and his own experience. He sees nothing beyond this life, and he cannot be considered anything but foolish.

We are often tempted to think that it would be wonderful if such–and–such a great athlete—or brilliant scientist, popular entertainer, or world leader—would become a Christian. But Jesus did not think this way when He chose His disciples. Some were probably well known in their local circles and perhaps a few of them were well off financially. But He did not choose them for their wealth or influence, and in His training of them He did not try to capitalize on any such things. None of them had anything so great that he was not ready to leave it to follow Christ.

In A.D. 178 the philosopher Celsus mockingly wrote of Christians:

Let no cultured person draw near, none wise and none sensible, for all that kind of thing we count evil; but if any man is ignorant, if any man is wanting in sense and culture, if anybody is a fool, let him come boldly [to become a Christian]. … We see them in their own houses, wool dresses, cobblers, the worst, the vulgarest, the most uneducated persons. … They are like a swarm of bats or ants creeping out of their nest, or frogs holding a symposium around a swamp, or worms convening in mud.

That is also what much of the rest of the world of his day thought of Christians. The simplicity of the gospel and the humility of faithful believers is incomprehensible to the world; it seems to be abject foolishness. The Lord planned it that way. **God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and … 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. It is interesting to note that **the despised** means, in the root form, “to be considered as nothing.” The Greek is in the perfect tense here, indicating that what was once despised will continue to be despised. So people who were thought to be nobodies in society would continue to be thought of as nobodies. The phrase **things that are not** translates the most contemptible expression in the Greek language. “Being” was everything to the Greeks, and to be called a nothing was the worst insult. The phrase may have been used of slaves.

The world measures greatness by many standards. At the top are intelligence, wealth, prestige, and position—things which God has determined to put at the bottom. God reveals the greatness of His power by demonstrating that it is the world’s nobodies that are His somebodies.

According to God, the greatest man who ever lived, apart from Jesus Himself, was John the Baptist. He had no formal education, no training in a trade or profession, no money, no military rank, no political position, no social pedigree, no prestige, no impressive appearance or oratory. Yet Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist” (Matt. 11:11). This man fit none of the world’s standards but all of God’s. And what he became was all to the credit of God’s power.

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