



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 1:26–31

1 Corinthians

“Great Subverter of Human Canons”

TRANSCRIPT

So it's time for us to begin. Let's open our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks for the privilege that is ours again. We thank Thee for the Word of God and for its message to us. And we thank Thee for the Apostle Paul who was a faithful minister of the Scriptures who Thou hast raised up to give us the Word of God. And we thank Thee for the way in which, by the Holy Spirit, he was able to live the kind of life that honored Thee and write the things that Thou wouldst have him to write. We thank Thee for them.

We thank Thee for the things that we understand. We ask that Thou art continue to give us light on the things that we do not yet fully understand.

We ask especially for the ones who are here this evening and pray for them and for their families, their loved ones, for their work, for their other things in which they're involved. We ask that Thou wilt supply their needs, Thou wilt also give them a positive testimony for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and enable to them to be evangelists in the truest sense of the gospel of Christ.

We pray this evening as we study the Word of God that each of us may profit from our time together, that our Lord may be exalted by the things that are said and the things that we feel in our hearts as we reflect upon the truth that has been given to us in grace.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Well, we’re turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 26 through 31 and hope to finish the first chapter this evening. The subject is the “Great Subverter of Human Canons.” That’s canon with one N, with one N. I changed the title slightly, but it’s essentially the same thing that was advertised in the bulletin. “The Great Subverter of Human Canons.” That, of course, is a reference to God, because that’s precisely what he does with respect to the things that men regard as given truths. But when we read the Word of God, we discover that the things that are given truths among men are not given truths with God in heaven. The apostle writes in verse 26, “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.”

Now, my text has “called,” *are called* in italics because the word is not precisely found, but it’s quite clear that the context indicates that that’s the meaning. Verse 27,

“But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

And the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,

That no flesh should glory in his presence,

But of Him (we could render that) now of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—

That, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.’”

Last week we mentioned in the introduction to the message that the Corinthian world was not unlike our world. God’s wisdom, which of course is found in his Word, is scorned. For the Jews, the crucified Messiah was utterly unacceptable. In fact, the very terms, the juxtaposition of “crucified Messiah” would have been regarded by them as only a whisker away, as someone has put it, from blasphemy, since every Jew knows if he has read the Bible he knows that God has declared to

everyone who hangs in shame on a tree stands under God’s curse. That’s the teaching of Deuteronomy 21:23. And it’s so common that Paul cites that text in Galatians chapter 3, verse 13 in its reference to Jesus Christ.

Not only was a crucified Messiah strange, but, even for Romans, apart from the emperor’s explicit sanction, no Roman citizen could be put to death by this means. That, in itself tells us something about crucifixion. Crucifixion was reserved for slaves, for aliens, for barbarians. It was not something that was talked about in all polite companies. Quite apart from the wretched torture inflicted on those who were executed by hanging on the cross, the cultural associations of crucifixion conjured of images of evil, corruption, a dismal rejection. Crucified Messiah. What a strange expression.

How things have changed, in one sense, because today what do we think about a cross? Well, the crosses are put on our buildings. The crosses are carried around by some of our religious leaders. Women wear crosses as decorations on their garments, and others then often put a cross in their lapels. It indicates at least that an entirely different attitude with reference to the cross is evident today, and we can credit that with Christianity or credit it to Christianity as bringing it to pass. But when we think of a crucified Messiah, we are looking at something that would have been strange in the day of the Apostle Paul.

Now, the Gentiles also were individuals, as we mentioned last week, who were filled with the goodness of wisdom. I made reference to a quotation of one Bible teacher who made reference to them and said that the Gentiles were intoxicated with fine words. So our Lord Jesus Christ is set forth by the Apostle Paul as the wisdom of God and the power of God. And I think you can see how different those expressions would have come over to the people of Paul’s day. The term “wisdom” itself was a term that Jewish people understood in the light of Proverbs chapter 8 where wisdom is presented as almost a person. And so people speak of personified wisdom as being a personal way of speaking with reference to God or, particularly, with reference to Jesus Christ. Now,

in the case of Proverbs chapter 8, it's likely that that is true and that wisdom there is a personification of the one who ultimately comes in his incarnation, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul and the apostles with him and other Christians who understood thought of human wisdom quite a bit differently from the Romans and the Greeks. To God and to Paul, human wisdom arises from man's rebellion against God, because human wisdom has a goal which men strived for was strived for apart from Jesus Christ, and so they traced the desire for wisdom according to human understanding and human definition to man's fallen nature.

Now, we mentioned last week in the citing of verse 19 from the book of Isaiah that Sargon had been murdered in 705 A.D. and Sennacherib, his son had succeeded him. Sennacherib's kingdom was rather loosely held together at the time, not so well-held together. So he launched campaigns in order to bring the empire into unity and also to give it strength. One of the things he wanted to do was to go down to Judah and to assume a first-hand control over that kingdom. He came and you remember Isaiah made certain prophecies with reference to this. In Isaiah chapter 29 in verse 13 and verse 14, we have some things that the prophet said in reference to the coming of the Assyrians. He said,

“Inasmuch as these people draw near me with their mouths” (He's talking about Israel)

And honor me with their lips but have removed their hearts far from me,

And their fear toward me is taught by the commandments of men,

Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work,

Among this people,

A marvelous work and a wonder;

For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish.

And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden.”

Now, he was talking about what ultimately became a miraculous deliverance of Judah from the hand of the Assyrians. What that statement of Isaiah indicates, of course, is, first of all, that Judah was very much the condition of many of our Christian churches today. They have all the outward show of Christianity, even with the literatures to make it more impressive, but the worship of a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ in a personal way from the heart was something that was far from them. The Lord Jesus, remember, cited that text in his ministry, so it was well-known.

Now, what Isaiah is seeking to show, of course, is that the real politician—we have a lot to think about right at the present moment because politics is big. But the real politician, the real person who controls everything is the triune God in heaven, the three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And our Lord is the arranger and the politician in contemporary society.

In the final analysis, it is our Lord that brings about earthquakes. It's our Lord who is responsible for the other things that happen in our society. He determines them, and he permits them. So in the ultimate since, since he controls all things as Paul says, he works all things by the counsel of his own will and power, ultimately things are traced to the Lord God in heaven.

Now, of course he not only acts in things like earthquakes and storms and fires, but he is involved also in the things that happen in our society as the one to whom we're ultimately responsible. In the final analysis, he has determined that AIDS exists for specific reasons. One can think of some, of course. To let us know that when we violate the Word of God, there are certain consequences that follow. So even those things that are evil, Scripture tells us very plainly are things that are often designed to teach us things about God in heaven.

Now, God, the Bible says, also acts of salvation. For example, in verse 21, the last time we read these verses, “For since, in the wisdom of God, but the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” And then in verse 24, “but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” So it is true that God acts in salvation.

Now, it’s a very interesting thing that we read in verse 21, these words. I had forgotten whether I mentioned this with you, because Sunday morning I went over to Fort Worth, and I spoke again on this passage over there after I had done some further study on it, some more little marvelous little things that I didn’t say to you last week, of course—but because I had three more days. But anyway, over there—and I don’t remember whether I said it to you, but in verse 21 we read, in the wisdom of God, but the world through wisdom, did not know God. In other words, it was God’s determining wisdom that men did not know him by wisdom. In the wisdom of God, men did not know him. He puts it this way, For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom has not known God.

Now, the question that might be asked is, if it is true that in the wisdom of God, the world has not known God, then how did these people come to believe in Christ to whom the apostle is writing? If it was God’s determination that the world by wisdom should not know God, why are these people here with us? How have they come into existence? If it was his determination that the world should not know him through wisdom, why is it there’s a company of people who not only know him, but worship him and who love him? Why is that?

Well, that exists for the simple reason that God also had a second purpose. His first purpose is that the world through wisdom should not know him. The second purpose is that he would call some. He would call some. That’s what he says. He says, “We preach Christ crucified to the Jews a stumbling block, to Greeks a foolishness”—this is what the world thinks—“But those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

So when we ask the ultimate question, why are there believers? Why are you here if you’re a believer? Why do you love the Word of God? Why do you love our Lord? Why do you get down upon your knees and pray? It’s because God’s special purpose with reference to you has come to pass. And you, out of the world, have been called to belong to him.

Now, the Scriptures make that so plain to a believer who thinks about it that one wonders how there could be any who study the Bible who could be surprised by such a thing as that. So when

they are surprised—I must say I often say to myself, have you been studying Scriptures? Have you reflected upon them? Have you really thought through what the Word of God says?

Now, when Paul comes to verse 26 he talks about his activity in this calling ministry. He’s already talked about call a number of times. He’s not finished with it. He will later talk about calling, too. But now he’s going to say something about this calling ministry in more detail. Verse 26 now begins with *for*. Well, he’s just said the foolishness of God is wiser than men, the weakness of God is stronger than men. The world doesn’t know him, but some know him who have been *called*.

So now you said about those who called, that they are ones who in the world’s eyes are foolish and weak. The whole message is foolishness to them and it’s weak. And so the apostle now says, for you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. In other words, the fact that God has passed by the world and has set his attention upon some, the apostle explains by the simple statement that there are some who have been chosen. There are some who have been elected out of the world.

And furthermore, the principles that he will talk about are that the message is foolishness to the Gentiles. It’s a stumbling block to Jewish people. It is reflected in the kind of people that belong to the Christian church. So you see what he’s doing, when he’s talking about the fact that the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men, and he says, look at yourself? You see your calling, you Corinthians. Look around in your congregation and notice the kind of people who have been called. They illustrate the principle, and the principle is God calls the weak. God calls those who accept this foolish message. God calls those who, in a sense, are nobodies in the world’s eyes. Not in his eyes; nobodies in the world’s eyes. He said, just look around, and you will see that what I am talking about is reflected in the congregation.

Now, I could look at you. I know that that’s true. I look out on this congregation, I know that not many wise and not many strong and not many well-born, all of those things that the world regards as its canons today reflected in all parts of our society you don’t see in Believers Chapel. I didn’t say, not any. So if you think you belong there, Scripture leaves room for you because Paul said

not many. He didn't say, not any. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.

Someone has called this an unanswerable *argumentum ad hominem*. That is, an argument according to just what you see, according to man. Moffatt, in his translation, has beautiful little translation. He says, “Why look at your own ranks, brothers, if you want to see that what I'm talking about is true. God calls the weak. God calls those that the world regards as not significant in their society.”

Now, last night, we were able to look at hundreds of those who really mean something in our society. I look down over that audience. And there weren't, as far as I can tell, many who look like you. They were all dolled up and decked out. They looked important. But I didn't hear the speaker use the term “God” once. Did you? I may have drifted off. [Laughter] I didn't drift off much because I was looking for that. I did not hear the word “God” once. “Church” was mentioned, so Martha told me, reminded me. I remembered that. Not once. Those are the movers and shakers of our society, so they think. But they are not. Isaiah's God is. Our God is.

Those are things that he has determined should be as they are. He's not surprised by anyone being there. None of them. Some, those were the people that we say walk in the corridors of power, but they're under the power of our triune God. Never forget it. They talked about the problems of our society. And the problems of our society are largely because the Scriptures are not regarded as the wisdom of men as well as of God.

I never intended to be a politician. Sometimes I imagine myself behind the platform when somebody's giving a speech and say—what would I say? But I'm happy God called me to something higher. So you see your calling, brethren. Just look at you and you will see that what I'm talking about is absolutely true, experientially, empirically we would say. You see your calling. Human wisdom, human strength, do not count ultimately with the Lord God.

John Allan of the Salvation Army once said, “I deserve to be damned; I deserve to be in hell, but God interfered.” That’s true with the thought of Scripture. Every one of us could truly say precisely that. I deserve to be condemned; I deserve to be in hell, but God interfered. He *called*.

Now, I mentioned that the apostle says, you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise. Selina, who was the Countess of Huntington, is in Christian circles a famous Christian worker. She was a noble lady. And she helped the Wesleys. And she helped many other Christians when she lived. And it was she who said—and this is quoted often in expositions of the Word of God. She said, “I thank God for the letter M in many, that not many,” because she was a noble lady. So if there are wise out there, and if there are well-born out there—all people born in Texas are eliminated, of course you understand that [laughter]—but you can say not many, he says, not any. Not many.

Now, I want you to notice another thing. After the apostle has stated, just look at yourself, just look at your calling, brethren, and you will see that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But now in verse 27 and verse 28 he mentions three times that despised word “chosen.” Chosen. Why is that so despising? Because ultimately it says you cannot get to heaven by yourself. You have to be chosen.

Now, people like to argue against that by saying, You mean to say there are certain people that are going to get to heaven and, therefore, if I’m not in that list, I’m not going to get there? Yes. That’s exactly right. But you’re still living. The gospel message goes forth. You may, right where you are at this moment—if any of you in this audience puzzle over that, you may settle that question right now. The invitation is given. Bow your head—

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Now, if you don’t want to do that, you have no excuse. You’re getting precisely what you wish. You cannot have it both ways. So I call upon you, if you’re not a believer, believe in him, trust him, bow before him right now. The time of invitation, people think, is at the end of a message. That’s not so. It’s right now if that has touched your heart. Turn with him. Settle the question. Eternal life is offered by our Lord through his apostles, through his prophets.

So coming back now to “God has chosen.” He says, but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise. God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame

the things of mighty. God and the base things of the world and the things which are despised, God has chosen. And the things which are not—now of course are not in the eyes of men, nobodies, that’s what most of us are, nobodies—things that are not in order to bring to nothing the things that are. We are the foolish. We are the weak. We are the obscure of birth.

No reason for self-esteem here. The only kind of self-esteem that really counts is the self-esteem that comes when we realize we’ve been chosen. That’s the source of all ultimately valid divinely-supported self-esteem, when we know that we belong to the Lord.

Now, you might think that if the apostle is saying he’s chosen the foolish things, he’s chosen the weak things, he’s chosen the base things of the world, then someone might come along and say Christianity—Christianity is only concerned with people like that. If you want to be a Christian, be ignorant. If you want to be a Christian, be base. If you want to be a Christian, be foolish. Christian—Christianity is for them.

Now, you know that human nature apart from God is so evil, so contradictory to the Word of God that somebody has bound to have used that as an argument. Well, you know they have. They’ve been using it as an argument all the way back to the 2nd century. Celsus used it in the 2nd century. He’s one of the first critics of Christianity. And he, himself, used that very thing, that very argument. In fact, I might be able to find exactly what he said in my notes.

He is one who said something just like this: He said, “Their injunctions are like this: let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near. For these able are thought by us to be evils, speaking as a Christian. But for anyone ignorant, anyone stupid, anyone uneducated, anyone who is a child, let him come boldly by the fact that they themselves admit that these people are worthy of their God, they show they want and are able to convince only the foolish, the dishonorable, and the stupid and only slaves, women, and children.” He was not a feminist, evidently. So that’s an argument against Christianity. Of course, Celsus evidently hasn’t read the passage we are looking at very seriously, or we’d have known that’s not Paul’s argument at all.

This passage is no excuse for insulting great people. And I want you to understand that there—as I looked at that audience last night of so many of our leaders, those that hold office, those that are involved in our government, I don’t look at all of them in an insulting way. They’ve made a name for themselves in this society. They’ve become senators. They’ve been congressmen. They are members of our Supreme Court and various other offices they hold in our government. We do not suggest that the Christian message is an excuse for insulting the great, as if they’re abandoned. No, what God is doing is trying to remind men, all men, those that stand up here, those that stand by here, that before him they all are at one level, all stand on one level.

And, incidentally, when we read that the mighty, the well-born, the powerful are not chosen, don’t think for one moment that that’s to bring you up above them. It’s not. It’s to put you both on the same level. That’s it. All of us are there in need of mercy and grace. The apostle never says that naturally, because we’re Christians, we stand above them. As a matter of fact, the more we learn about our Christianity, the more we realize we’re on that same low level before the lord God.

Now, why has God done this? Why, Paul tells us. He has chosen the foolish things to put to shame the wise. He’s chosen the weak things to put to shame the things that are mighty. He’s chosen the base things, the things which are despised, the things which are to bring to nothing the things that are. He’s trying to show, all of them, great in the eyes of men, small in the eyes of men, foolish in the eyes of men, that we are all sinners and in need of divine grace. We all stand on that level of need before the Lord God. The Apostle Paul wrote, “You stand by faith. Be not high minded, but fear.” And that of course is what he’s talking about.

This is not given to us to do as Calvin says, “To plume the feathers of the saved, those who have the wisdom of God.” It’s not given to us to make us feel good. It’s given to remind us who we really are and of God’s manifest grace to us. The things that are not, well, of course, these are the nobodies that I referred to.

Incidentally, you can tell from this that there’s no merit in the election of the elect. What are they? Foolish? Weak? Base? Nobodies? No merit. We don’t get to heaven on our merit. We’re not in

the elect company because we have something that God recognizes. So the faith that we have we know is a gift from God.

Now, in verse 30, the apostle says that God is the source of our being and our blessing. And if that's so, of course, if he's the source of my being and of my blessing, where can I fit my pride in there, my self-esteem apart from God? No. Paul says, but of him, you are in Christ Jesus. No cause for pride. We live only of him, and we live only in Christ Jesus. In other words, what we have is the gift of God. It's from him. He's the source of it.

Now, of course when he says “of him,” he's saying, We are of God. We're in Christ. And we're not of God in Christ because of the wisdom we possess or the position that we have. Now, he says that when we are *of him in Christ* that he has become for us wisdom from God. Now, you will have to take my word for this. And if you do, you'll be right. I'm sorry. I've been listening to Rush too much. [Laughter] But I am right. In the original text when he says “of him in Christ Jesus, we have been made the wisdom of God,” those next three words plainly are explanatory of the force of wisdom. In other words, there are not four things, but one thing which is defined as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

So the wisdom is simply defined more specifically. We might remember Colossians 2:3 when we read, by in him are hidden all the treasures of the—the treasures of the wisdom of God and of knowledge. Well, here are some of the things that are ours because we possess in him the wisdom of God. First of all, righteousness.

Now, he's not talking about the fact that we live right. Of course, those who are righteous before God are to live right. But what he is talking about is the standing that we have before God. This is a forensic term, a legal term. So when we read here that in—we are in Christ Jesus who has been our righteousness, he means that we have a righteousness from God by God's declaration that is satisfactory to him, that he's pleased with. He's given it to us. It's the ticket, the way in which we are qualified to enter heaven by. Justified.

The Scriptures use the term “justified.” It means to declare righteous; not made righteous, declare righteous. We shall be made righteous, of course, but when we believe in Christ, that moment we are declared righteous before God because we are in our substitute. We’re in our covenantal head, and he stands for us. So of him, of God, we are in Christ, and thus we have justification.

John Bunyan once said, “My righteousness has been in heaven for 1800 years.” And what he meant by that is simply that he stood in his covenantal head Jesus Christ who has born his judgment on Calvary’s cross and, therefore, his righteousness is in heaven in Christ, and he’s united with him. This is the marvelous wisdom of God by which we unwise, sinful, base, nobodies may have a righteousness acceptable to God. What could be more wonderful than that? A forensic term. In effect, we’ve stood before the judge of all the earth. And he’s pronounced with reference to us the verdict of not only acquittal, but of the conferring of a positive righteousness. Sanctification.

You know the ways of men are such in our society that they don’t really like to think about salvation as a gift of God or that justification is a gift of us through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The ways of men call for human effort, for good deeds, for wise words as the path of salvation. The Scriptures tell us we’re such as can never earn anything before God, but what we cannot earn when we recognize who we are, he gives to those who acknowledge their debt.

So we have righteousness. We have sanctification. This is received by faith, too. We are holy people. Now, there’s a sense, of course, in which those who are sanctified are, of course, by God’s word are to live in a sanctified fashion. But what he’s talking about here again is our position. We have been in Christ made holy, declared holy. That’s what he meant back in chapter 1 when he said in verse 2, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus.

Now, the Corinthians were anything but holy. The whole epistle is written to correct the unholiness that existed there, but he calls them sanctified. Why? Because that’s their position. And in chapter 6 in verse 11 we come to this ultimately after he’s talked about thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, homosexuals, and so forth. He says, and such were some of you, but you were washed, but

you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. So we have justification. We have sanctification.

Incidentally we're not in Christ for justification and out of him for sanctification. No. This is the gift of God, too. We're called upon to live saintly since we're saints. All of you are saints if you believe in Christ.

Now, the third word—this seems a little startling. Justification, sanctification. You might expect him to say “glorification,” wouldn't you? Justification, sanctification, glorification. The end of a little series. No. He's talking about positional things, and we know that from the first two here. What is this redemption? Seems out of order, but I suggest to you that what he's really talking about is the redemption of our bodies at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me read you a passage in Romans chapter 8 which I think will explain. The apostle writes in Romans 8:23 after saying, “We know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” Redemption of our body. Look at it. Look at it.

You can use me as an illustration. I did my best tonight to look good. Combed my head, put on a new shirt. I have on a new tie. I know you noticed that, the new tie. Looked in the mirror. There were a few flaws, [laughter] but I thought maybe I could hide them being this far from you. No. Redemption, the redemption of the body, the completion of the whole program awaits the resurrection when we receive a body like unto his own glorious body. But in Christ, we have it. We have the redemption, as he says. He's been made unto us wisdom from God, the wisdom of divine righteousness, divine sanctification, divine redemption.

Incidentally, redemption is the first and last gift. Redemption from our sins when we believe. Redemption of our body at the resurrection when we meet our lord in the air if we're living at that time.

Now, you might ask, what’s the purpose in this elective calling that he’s talking about? Well, first of all, to put it very generally, what God is really interested in is he wants us to aspire to desire, to love the glory of God only. So if we aspire to promote the glory of God in our lives by giving him the control of them, seeking to give him control of them—it’s very difficult to give him the total control—but seeking that, aspiring to that in that way we promote the glory of God. That’s what he’s interested in. He said that twice here. You notice he said in verse 29 that no flesh should glory in his presence. No flesh is to glory in the presence of God. And then here, as it is written, he who glories, let him glory in the Lord. If you’re going to boast, don’t boast on yourself. Boast in the Lord. That passage incidentally is a passage from Jeremiah chapter 9.

I have a lady in Little Rock who listens to our ministry, and I’ve gotten to know her. In fact, she’s been here in the congregation several times with her family. And she’s been after me to teach Jeremiah. And Jeremiah is not an easy book to teach. It was one of the first books I ever attempted when I didn’t know much about the Bible. I discovered it was not easy. There’s a lot of repetition there. And preachers when they come to repetition, that’s a problem, because people in the audience don’t want them to ever use the same illustration unless it hasn’t been used in the last ten years [laughter]. So Jeremiah is not easy.

Paul had this in mind. Jeremiah 9:23 and 24 when he was writing these words,

“Thus says the Lord:

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,

Let not the mighty man glory in his might,

Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;

But let him who glories glory in this,

That he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness,
judgment, and righteousness in the earth.

For in these I delight.”

Not let the wise man—Paul just talked about the wise. Not let the strong man, he’s talked about those who are mighty and those who are weak. The rich man. Well, he didn’t mention—specifically mention—he just mentioned well-born. Because we know, at least as one of my friends says, until the industrial era, almost all of the people who were *rich* were those who have been well-born. Travel to Britain today. And you see this castle and that castle and that castle. That’s still owned by the families of those men who were lords and dukes and earls of the men of the royal family of relations down through the years. They own thousands of acres still. So the well-born.

Now, Jeremiah is the one who has said, as Paul has cited, he who glories, let him glory in the Lord. Because this knowledge of what is strong, what is weak, what is well-born, what is not, what is wise, and what is not, it’s the right knowledge, the knowledge of the Lord God that produces both trust and fear.

Now, I want to ask you a question. You live in the society of 1993. You look around this society, and what do you find? You find in our society that the canons that determine what is great and marvelous in our society are not the canons that are set forth in the Word of God. What we are interested in is the rich, the mighty, the well-born, all of those that have that kind of influence. And the apostle, in effect, has said, no. That kind of focus of triumphalism is contrary to the teaching of the Word of God.

The thing in the Bible that is triumphant is the—what a close friend of mine says, the odious death of Christ. We call that the triumphant, odious death of Christ: odious to the world; triumphant to God; triumphant to the Christian when he finally cried out, “It is finished,” and my salvation was secure forever. What a blessing. So wisdom, wealth, social clout, you know, Paul would have had some other strong words to say about that if he didn’t repeat these that are found here.

You can see that what is presupposed by all that Paul says is the doctrine of divine election because they all are down here in this level. Not a one of them can earn his way to heaven. He’s condemned them all. The well-born, the mighty, the wise, they’re all nothing. How are they going to

get to heaven? By divine election, by divine choice by which they turn from their nothingness, their weakness, their poor status, and believe in him who loved sinners and gave himself for them.

The beautiful people, the beautiful people, according to God, are these people. We talk about the beautiful people. You know, we use that term, “the beautiful people.” Some of them were there last night. Others will be there on your TV screen tonight, the nights—the rest of the nights of this week. They will be there. The beautiful people. They’re all over the country, and we give adulation to them. And unfortunately in the Christian church, because the Christian church, the evangelical church is caught up in a great deal of this triumphalism.

And so who do we have to give testimony to the things of the Lord God? Athletes? Well, I’m delighted to have any athlete who has believed in Jesus Christ, and I do rejoice when one of them, as the young man who won one of our major tournaments this last year said when he was asked about it, I give the glory to God through Jesus Christ my Lord. That’s great.

But so much of what is done in the evangelical church today is to bow to the triumphalism that is in our churches themselves. The truly important thing, the truly important wisdom is the knowledge of God. And God’s most significant act of wisdom is Messiah crucified. He may become for us righteousness, sanctification, and complete redemption. Come to him for it.

I was troubled last night—that’s the reason it came up in my message. I was troubled because I heard all about the problems of America. And it was a good speech. It’s an interesting speech. The President did a good job of delivering it. We discussed the problems of crime. We discussed the problems of the health system. We discussed other problems of the United States of America. Well, the one remedy, the one source of remedy, so far as I can tell, was not mentioned. We were left to human wisdom. That’s discouraging. That’s discouraging for our country.

We are sinking into a kind of relationship in our society in which God and the Scriptures do not really count. They are the things that are not today, are not in heaven’s eyes. May God help us as Christians to realize that in him we have these marvelous things, and we also in other passages in the

Word of God are urged by the Holy Spirit, the apostles and prophets to make known to others what we ourselves know. May God help us to do that. Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these marvelous passages from the hand of the great apostle. May we be submissive to them.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.