

Study 2: Christian Boasting

How not to be popular



Boasting. It would rank pretty high on the 'how not to be popular' charts. People who boast about themselves are a pain to be around. They talk about themselves in order to make others admire them, but their boasting makes them boring and pretty soon friendless. A slightly more subtle way to promote yourself is to boast about someone else. Someone connected to you. Have you ever heard people boast about their kids? "My little Johnny learnt to read when he was only three and always does exactly as he is told." It makes other parents feel inadequate and is a thinly veiled way of boasting about yourself.

The Corinthian church had a problem with boasting. Last week we were introduced to one aspect of this problem: members of the church were boasting about their leaders. Different groups within the church followed different men (1 Cor 1:12) and they each boasted about the impressiveness of their particular leader. This led to divisions in the church.

But the Corinthians were also boasting about other things. In this week's passage, Paul addresses two more boasts.

Boast 1

In pairs read through 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. Can you identify the first boast? [Hint: Identifying one or two repeated words or ideas may help. As you read through the passage underline key words or ideas that seem to be repeated. Does this give you any clues?] The Corinthians were boasting about their _____.

1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

How do you think that this boasting would have affected the church?

Verse 19 is a quote from Isaiah. What did God promise to do?

Read 1:20-21. How did God destroy the 'wisdom of the wise'?

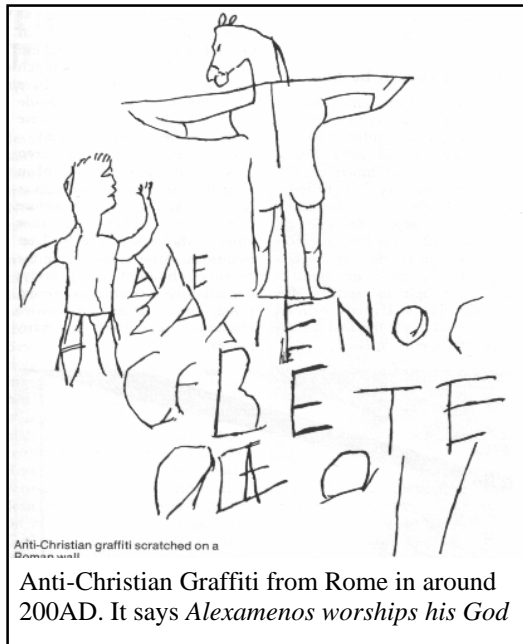
Can we come to know God through our own cleverness? Explain.

In verse 21, how is the gospel described?

The Corinthians were boasting about their wisdom and the wisdom of their teachers. But God has no time for this 'worldly wisdom'. In God's wisdom, he chose to turn human wisdom on its head. No matter how clever you are, your cleverness will not help you to know God. The only way people will come to know God is through believing this 'foolish' gospel.

Read verses 22-24 and fill in the table.

Group	Jews	Greeks / Gentiles
What they think is wise		
What they naturally think of a crucified saviour		
What they think of the cross when they're called by God		



Abiud was a first century Jew. He was looking forward to the time of the messiah – he'd be a powerful king who'd perform miraculous signs, overthrowing the Roman government and bringing prosperity to God's chosen race.

What would Abiud think of worshipping a crucified messiah?

Diana was a first century greek woman. She prayed and sacrificed to a variety of gods so that they'd protect her family from harm.

How would Diana feel about worshipping a crucified God?

To Abiud and Diana, Paul's message of the cross is ridiculous. Who in their right mind would worship a God who was crucified? But "the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom and the weakness of God is wiser than man's strength" (1:25.) What do Jews and Greeks whom God has called think about the cross? (1:24)

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18. What do your non-believing friends and family think of the message of the cross? How do you feel about this?

Have you ever been tempted to bypass or disguise the 'foolishness of the cross' when speaking to friends about your faith?

To summarise this section, finish this sentence. "The Corinthians should not boast about their wisdom because

But the Corinthians were also boasting about other things.

Boast 2

1:26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Read 1:26-31. What kind of background did most of the Corinthians have?

Why did God choose people like the Corinthians?

It seems likely that the Corinthian church were dominated by a set of social-climbers and *nouveau riche* members who were tempted to boast about their status (see introduction to study 1). Paul argues that the Corinthian church itself is evidence that God doesn't choose people on the basis of their social status or wealth. Instead the opposite is true. God chooses the things that aren't valued by us to show us the non-value of the things that we do value.

Why shouldn't the Corinthians boast about their social status?

How caught up in status are we?

When you talk to people about the other people who go to your church, who do you mention? The rich? The poor? The popular? The unpopular?

Which visitors at church do we welcome most warmly? Do we welcome those who are middle class and intelligent more warmly than others? Are our values the same as God's?

Boasting in the Lord

Read 1:30-31. What should we boast in?

What does it mean to "boast in the Lord" (also consider Jeremiah 9:23-24.)

What difference would 'boasting in the Lord' make to the Corinthian church?

What practical ways can you 'boast in the Lord' rather than boasting in other things? What difference might this make in our church?