

CHRISTMAS 2003

THE TRIUMPH OF THE SAVING WISDOM OF GOD OVER THE FOOLISHNESS OF MAN

I Corinthians 1:17-31

It would seem paradoxical, yet nevertheless true, to suggest that the Christmas season is a time of great foolishness concerning the great wisdom of God! The fact of widespread foolishness at this season needs no further comment. But that this season, at its root, is an unveiling of the infinite wisdom of God, in the face of man's foolishness, calls for explanation. And this the Apostle Paul does lavishly by employing these two contrasting terms, "foolishness" and "wisdom."

"Foolishness" in the Old Testament means stupidity, thoughtlessness, but especially with respect to disregarding the revealed will of God (Prov. 1:7b; 15:5; 16:22). In the New Testament, there is the similar meaning of unreasonableness, reckless thinking, lack of understanding, being dull and moronic, without understanding and discernment (Matt. 25:1-2; Luke 24:25; Rom. 1:21). Again the misuse of the mind by unrighteous motivation plays a key role in all of this.

"Wisdom" in the Old Testament means experience based upon the righteous employment of knowledge. This knowledge is both revealed by God and obtained from the surrounding world. The governing righteousness is that of the God of Israel, and none other (Ps. 111:10). In the New Testament, there is similarly righteous discernment that results in prudent activity (Matt. 7:24b). But here in I Corinthians 1:19, there is clever, earthly wisdom, non-the-less religious, that is utter foolishness to God that will be destroyed.

Hence, there is foolishness in this world's esteem that is wisdom according to God, and there is wisdom in this world that is foolishness according to God. And it is the Christian who should see things as God sees them. Paul was concerned about this both with regard to the Ephesian Christians who are with him from where he writes, and the Corinthian Christians to whom he writes. Certainly both Corinth and Ephesus were great centers of European and Asian foolishness.

A. The *Foolishness* of Human Religion and the cross, v. 17.

So Paul writes: "[Jesus] Christ did not send me to baptize but to evangelize/preach the gospel, not with word wisdom [σοφία λόγου, *sophia logou*], impressive oratory, rhetorical flourish], in order that the cross of Christ might not be emptied/voided." He emphasizes two areas of disruptive foolishness that have invaded local church life, v. 11, that must be exposed as counterproductive, indeed opposed to the heart of the gospel.

1. *Water Baptism*. It is a mere earthly rite, which Paul certainly employed, vs. 14-16. But in no way is it to be associated with saving efficacy. Such an emphasis is utterly subversive to the saving grace of God poured out through the cross of Christ. So in Corinth and Ephesus there were religions of every variety that taught that an outward form of religious activity, including the use of idols, sacrifices and ecstasies, could save the soul!
2. *Cleverness of speech*. Also in these great commercial and religious centers there was much reverence for learning, especially "superiority of speech . . . [and] persuasive words of wisdom . . . of the rulers of this age, . . . human wisdom," vs. 2:1, 4, 6, 13. But Paul,

having learned so much of this at the University of Tarsus, has attended another institution teaching wisdom that is diametrically opposite, the College of Jesus Christ, possibly located in the Arabian desert (Gal. 1:15-17). Here he received a commission and a new type of unction, 2:4, to proclaim the wisdom of God, not the futile wisdom of this world. This was wisdom concerned with what God has done according to His carefully planned course in world history, not what boastful man is able to accomplish.

B. The *Foolishness* of Man Concerning the Cross, v. 18.

“For the word of the cross to those perishing is foolishness/moronic [μωρία, mōria], but to those who are being saved it is the power of God.” It is all a matter of perspective, and two opposing viewpoints are described, one of man and the other that of God.

1. The foolishness of the cross, according to the unbeliever.

More specifically, what is it that the man of this world regards as foolish, ridiculous, absurd, with regard to the word of the cross of Christ?

- a. The condition of man, as being thoroughly sinful.
- b. The impotence of man, as being beyond self-help.
- c. The divine remedy of redemption, for the cleansing of the soul.

2. The wisdom of the cross, according to the believer.

More specifically, what is it that the Christian regards as so glorious, so enthralling, so wonderful, with regard to the cross of Christ?

- a. The new condition of man, as being forgiven by God.
- b. The new potency of man, as indwelt by the Spirit of God.
- c. The divine remedy of redemption, as the justification of God.

C. The *Foolishness* of Man’s Wisdom, vs. 19-20.

However the focus here continues to be in the realm of foolishness and wisdom with regard to Judaism and Christianity.

1. The positive wisdom of Scripture, v. 19.

“For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of those [claiming] to understand, I will set aside/dismiss [ἀθετέω, atheteō].’” Here is the divine perspective that man ignores. Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14, though he assumes the context of v. 13. Here the wisdom of man in religion, mere formality, the repetitive learning of tradition, the willful alienation of his heart, is denounced. But more than this, man is told that God is going to do something about this; He will intervene and confound man’s wisdom!

2. The negative wisdom of man, v. 20a.

“Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?” In the sight of God they are less than unimportant! Surely Paul now draws upon personal experience here in terms of three areas of his own former competence as a learned yet foolish rabbi, when at that time he was “extremely zealous for his ancestral traditions” (Gal. 1:14).

- a. The foolishness of “*the wise man*.” Paul “advancing in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries” (Gal. 1:14), also boasted in his carnal achievements (Phil. 3:4-6).
- b. The foolishness of “*the scribe*.” If Paul achieved notoriety as a writer of letters (II Cor. 10:9-10), we can be sure he wrote extensively before his conversion, probably on account of his Tarsus education.
- c. The foolishness of “*the debater*.” Again, if Paul was able in dispute after his conversion, even on Mars Hill, Athens (Acts 9:29; 17:22-31), then certainly he would have argued vigorously when he earlier campaigned against Christians, having authority from the high priest in Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2).

3. The positive wisdom of God, v. 20b.

“Has not God made foolish/moronic/stupid [μωραίνω, morainō] the wisdom of this world?” The question here expects a positive answer. “Yes, indeed, God has invalidated man’s aspirations for cleverness and acknowledged brilliance! He has deflated man’s bloated religiosity! In other words, God has done something that has totally confounded, nullified man’s “best.” He has once and for all pricked the bubble of human boasting (Rom. 3:27). And what we remember at Christmas concerning the birth of the seemingly helpless babe of Bethlehem, is but one aspect of God’s confounding, humiliating ways.

This point will be elaborated upon in v. 21. During the centuries before Christ, the best that man could set forth in the Greek and Roman empires, only ended in eventual failure; and their utter inability to really deal with the human condition, whether by means of philosophic brilliance or military might, is faithfully recorded in the history books. But read also the same glorious gospel truth expounded in vs. 27-31. Christmas is the dawning of the wisdom of God upon a foolish, vain, and crazy world. Come let us adore Him, and His Son as incarnate wisdom, v. 30.

D. The *Frustration* of Man’s Wisdom, v. 21a.

While Paul describes how God has not remained passive, but rather has actively responded to the foolishness of man, namely “I will destroy,” v. 19, and He has “made foolish,” v. 20, the wisdom of man, there is a further area of God’s oversight that is now revealed. It is that God has played out His leash which tethers mankind. He has given him more and more rope whereby man has the freedom under God to plot his own course in attempting to become “wise.” It is like the Father giving his inheritance to the prodigal son and thus extending to him the liberty to seek “wisdom” in the far country (Luke 15:11-13). Certainly, for a while, the son thought his pursuit to be wise. So for centuries before the coming of Jesus Christ, while God “overlooked the times of ignorance” (Acts 17:30), mankind accepted the latitude and

endeavored to pursue wisdom on his own terms. But what was the result? “Since/because in the wisdom of God the world, through [the] wisdom, did not know God.”

1. The wisdom of God grants latitude.

Paul also, earlier in his life, had enjoyed the liberty of pursuing the wisdom of this world. Surely he had studied philosophy and logic and rhetoric, even rabbinical Judaism, yet he did not discover God! Though he was found by God on the Damascus road. Doubtless he had considered the arguments for the existence of God, the teleological, the ontological, the anthropological, etc., yet even in accepting their conclusions he had only arrived at some prime cause, some abstract supreme being. Nevertheless, as a Hebrew, for a time, he considered himself to be advancing, yet in the end all that he obtained proved to be “rubbish [σκύβαλον, skubalon]” (Phil. 3:8). This pursuit did not penetrate his soul in the slightest. By studying the God of rabbinical Judaism he did not come to know God. Though he probably concluded that his scholastic friends were no more advanced than he!

2. The wisdom of man is futile.

But here Paul has come to a broader understanding of what God has been doing, not just with himself, but the world at large. In His wise ordering of the centuries preceding the coming of Jesus Christ, He played out the tether and “overlooked the times of ignorance” so that “if perhaps [the nations] . . . might grope for Him and find Him” (Acts 17:30, 27). This was the wisdom of God, in century after century, that increasingly proved man’s *inability* to find Him (Job 11:7; Rom. 11:33-34), in the far country of this world. During the pinnacle of Greek learning, the height of Roman domination, yet the God of redemption was not found or uncovered through human investigation. At best there resulted the carnal polytheism of Greece and Rome, epitomized by the Pantheon in Rome, which in turn became a symbol for synthetic, morally derelict religion.

But why did man fail in this quest over the centuries? It was not on account of a lack of clarity concerning the witness of God, for Paul declared on Mars Hill that, “He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). Rather it was the willful blindness of man, his spiritual imbecility and perverseness! So that, as Paul writes in Romans, “even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. . . . And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper” (Rom. 1:21-23, 28).

But did God utterly abandon man in this hopeless predicament, his captivity in the far country, his proven foolishness? No, He not only observed man in his pitiable and hopeless condition, but also determined to do something about it. He would not only further demonstrate the utter foolishness of man’s best efforts, especially in the realm of religion, but also, at the same time, display the wisdom of His indomitable saving power.

E. The *Foolishness* of the Gospel, v. 21b.

“God was well-pleased [εὐδοκέω, eudokeō] through the foolishness of the proclamation [κήρυγμα, kērugma] to save those believing.” To begin with, God did not choose preachers from Athens or Rome, but northern Galilee, mere fishermen. To this band he added a humiliated, outlawed Jewish rabbi, Saul who became Paul. Here was a group least likely to succeed in bringing men to God, except that in the wisdom of God they did succeed, way beyond the former success of Greece and Rome. The reason was that they had a message so glorious such as had never been heard before. It is for this reason that Paul, in writing to Christians in imperial Rome can declare that, “I am not ashamed of the gospel [in Rome or Athens], for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). What then is this gospel?

1. It is the gospel of the proclamation of the foolishness of the cross.

Paul is really explaining that God’s gospel is unlike anything that religious man has encountered over the centuries. For this reason, man is quick to brand it as “foolishness,” really because it strikes his pride so painfully.

- a. Man is a thorough sinner.
- b. Man is paralyzed by sin.
- c. God has sent His Son to save lost man.

Who did He send? It was His Son, a babe born in a manger, a Nazarene, a carpenter’s son, a friend of publicans and sinners, a man crucified and buried, so that the world continues to regard this as quite irregular, unheard of, embarrassing, unsuitable, intolerable! Man’s problem is grasping that the wisdom of God did not require intellectual ability; human status was of no consequence. What God did seek was humble repentance, confession of foolishness, even as the prodigal son acknowledged (Luke 15:17). Nevertheless, even today this wisdom of God continues to be decried as foolishness. Man would proudly strut into heaven, but for God that is the greatest foolishness.

2. It is the gospel that saves fools, in God’s sight, who believe.

So, “God was well-pleased,” by means of this gospel alone, this “power of God unto salvation,” this renunciation of human merit, to save man in his declared foolishness. This means that a person, in agreeing that he is foolish, casts himself upon the wisdom of God, His only beloved Son. Christmas is the “good pleasure of God” to foolish man, that is to those who will believe it. And for those who genuinely believe, whatever the foolish world may say, they discover that this is the wisdom of God indeed by which they receive “righteousness and sanctification and redemption,” v. 30.

F. The *Foolishness* of the Gospel to Jew and Greek, vs. 22-25.

In a sinful world, what God determines and what man pursues are usually opposites. God determines that which is holy; man seeks after the unholy; God employs wisdom while man follows after foolishness. However, God being God in all of His sovereignty, He is certain to ultimately have His way so that eventually His holiness and wisdom will prevail. If man persists in his rebellion in this regard, in the end he will be the loser and irrevocably crushed. In vs. 19-21 we have already seen this sovereign assertion of God in the face of man's mutinous attitude, namely, "I will destroy" man's wisdom, v. 19, "God has made foolish" man's wisdom, v. 20, and "God was well-pleased" to save those who believe in the cross, v. 21. Now we consider contrasting responses to this message of the cross on the part of man.

1. The concern of Jew and Greek for signs and wisdom, v. 22.

"Since/because both Jews ask for signs and Greeks seek wisdom." The desire for signs, wonders, miraculous display, on the part of the Jews, whose national history incorporated many instances of astonishing supernatural events, is not unlike the passion for display that overwhelms this present Christmas season. We have become intoxicated with a desire for sparkling colored lights, illuminated images, and the more the merrier. Then we have also pursued folksy Christmas wisdom, that is "jolliness," or such as the spa music that declared, "Christmas is the time for fun." And there are numerous other abstract clichés about "peace on earth," and "good will toward men," and "the season of giving," that have nothing to do with what the Scripture means in these instances. Here is pagan folk-religion, that becomes disturbed, offended when we attempt to focus on the real significance of Jesus Christ.

2. The concern of Jew and Greek for Christ, v. 23.

"But we preach Christ who has been crucified, both to Jews an offence [σκάνδαλον, skandalon] and to Gentiles foolishness [μωρία, mōria]." Here the real meaning of Jesus Christ is heralded with great, serious conviction. And what is the response? To those who like "signs," the lights and sparkle and glitter, Jesus Christ is an affront, an outrage, an unnecessary invasion of man's foolishness. So they object, "I love my foolishness, and I am going to have it, no matter what the cost!" To those who like the moralistic clichés and platitudes, this cross on which there is shed blood is nonsense, baloney, absurd. So they object, "I love my light-hearted, hackneyed, sentimental prattling, and nobody is going to spoil it!" Well, they can have it, but along with it will be their rejection by that very crucified Christ at His day of judgment on the world. And this will not be such a light-hearted, sentimental gathering!

3. The concern of the called for God, both Jew and Greek, v. 24-25.

Hence here we have been dealing with a perspective on life and this world that is utterly contrary to the real mission of Jesus Christ. He has not come to be illuminated, but rather to illuminate man in his darkness; He has not appeared to merely moralize because man is incapable of the morality that pleases God. Rather, "God was well-pleased," v. 21, to save from worthy condemnation. And those being lost, who are found, suddenly awaken to the glorious truth of what God has wrought.

a. The power and wisdom of God the Son, v. 24.

“But to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” The peculiar preferences of the Jew and Greek, “showy signs” and “abstract platitudes,” are now regarded as utterly superfluous. What really matters is being the object of his particular grace, as the “called” of God, to hear the persuasive, beckoning voice of God.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 ‘I am this dark world’s Light;
 Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
 And all thy days be bright.’
 I looked to Jesus, and I found
 In Him my Star, my Sun;
 And in that light of life I’ll walk
 Till traveling days are done.

Then, all of the world is seen for what it really is, its total foolishness, its tawdry goals, its empty, crumbling rewards, its bitter fruit. But on the other hand a whole new perspective takes over. The hope of the kingdom of Christ is seen as incomparably glorious, even its present building, but supremely its consummate future, “the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne” (Matt. 19:28), “the period of restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21). And it is the cross that has accomplished all of this! Here is the wisdom and power of God, saving to completeness, in a manner that utterly demolishes the wisdom of man, leaving it buried in the dust! So Paul boasts, and Christians with him, “May it never be that I would 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).

b. The wisdom and power of God the Father, v. 25.

“Because the foolishness of God is wiser [σοφώτερος, *sophōteros*] than that of men, and the weakness of God is stronger than that of men.” It is significant that the fall of man not only included the serpent’s enticement, “you will be like God,” but also Eve’s longing for the forbidden fruit that was able “to make one wise” (Gen. 3:5-6). In other words, the temptation for our first parents was to be as wise as God, to be divine and on a par with God. Before this Lucifer had declared, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa. 14:13-14). Here is supreme arrogance; here is the essence of sin.

Of course equality with God in the realm of wisdom, that is cleverness, ingenuity, skill, v. 19, as desirable as it may be, is of little worth unless there is commensurate power for its execution. So the combination of both wisdom and power, so evident in God, is coveted by man, except that He wants it for his own independent employment. And if, in all honesty, He cannot attain the degree of holy wisdom and power that God reflects, then at least he will aspire to live, again independently, craving for unholy wisdom and power. In other words, man wants to be like God, yet apart from His holiness and the acknowledgment of personal creatureliness. And from heaven’s perspective, this is the greatest foolishness! Why is this so? Because it

abysmally fails to comprehend the infinite greatness of God's wisdom and power and holiness as well as man's pigmy-like, frail stature by way of comparison.

(1) The infinite wisdom of God.

“Because the foolishness of God is wiser [σοφώτερος, *sophōteros*] than that of men.” Isaiah 55:6-9 confronts the same problem of man's unwillingness to bow humbly before God on His terms. “Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Here is well illustrated the vital importance of having a biblical view of the character of God, and especially in contrast with that of Talmudic and Greek speculation. In general, man's finest, his brightest and best ideology and religious ideals, are worthless, for the very fact that they leave out the holy supremacy of God over man.

But more specifically here, the gospel of the particular grace of God for sinners, that which the world regards as “the foolishness of God,” is transcendently superior to “the wisdom of man.” The humiliation of the incarnation, the suffering of the Son of God on a Roman cross, the exclusion of all human merit, all of which man finds to be unreasonable and inconceivable, is in the reality of the Word of God, the summit of divine wisdom.

(2) The infinite power of God.

“And the weakness of God is stronger than that of men.” In a manner similar to Isaiah, Job 38:1-40:4 confronts man's unwillingness, in his puny ability, to bow humbly before a God of infinite sovereignty. “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth,” v. 4. The end result is that Job acknowledges his need to shut his mouth and yield unconditionally to his Maker. So Paul declares that man's most stupendous achievements, his mightiest endeavors in terms of architecture, exploration, and technology, are dwarfed by the planets in their seasonal rotation, the intricacy of molecular design, the universal works of God!

But more specifically here, while man's employment of self-advancement, with its tattered, threadbare results, is lauded in the United Nations and the halls of learning throughout the world, to the exalted praise of man, God's implementation of His power, through the cross of Christ, in thoroughly cleansing the human soul, is far more effectual, more magnificent. Consider Paul in I Corinthians 4:6, “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” Man cannot compete in this league. Here is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). He trumps man's continual, increasing failure, he being bankrupt of resources!

G. The Foolishness of the Called, vs. 26-29.

But now Paul, having made such a grand point, brings it down to a most personal level. He addresses his saintly audience, “you,” in a very down-to-earth fashion, vs. 26, 30. If he has humbled unbelieving man in general, Jew and Gentile, he is not finished with this procedure of humiliation. For the apostle now makes the point that those he writes to, Corinthian Christians, are nothing special in themselves, even on account of their being the “called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28), v. 26.

1. The *divine unemployment* of worldly personalities, v. 26.

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise [σοφία, sophia] according to flesh, not many powerful [δυνατός, dunatos], not many well-born/noble [εὐγενής, eugenēs, were called].” In the light of Paul’s conversion, his being “called” (Gal. 1:14-16), the thought of man calling/choosing God could not be farther from his mind. Thus God is delighted, v. 21b, frequently to choose the scrawny of society, the bedraggled, the commoner of average IQ, as trophies of His grace. This was certainly the manner of the founding of the Christian church through the original apostolic band. However, the intelligentsia, the aristocracy, the nobility, the powerful are not totally excluded. The real problem is that their status tends to trap them, to engulf them in self-aggrandizement and worldly preoccupation; their inclusion in the kingdom of Christ is difficult, though not impossible (Matt. 19:23-26).

But why does God make this his *modus operandi*? Because He knows of man’s inclination to rob God of His honor and claim it for himself. After all, He is the supreme ruler of the universe! Hence it is to be expected that God rightly, exclusively claims glory for himself. Furthermore, it is He who saves man, from beginning to finish, providing “wisdom, . . . and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,” v. 30. Therefore, as Paul quotes Jeremiah: “Thus says the LORD, ‘Let not a wise man boast in his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast in 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” (Jer. 9:23-24), v. 31.

Christmas then is a time for turning *from* the wisdom of man, which is foolishness, *to* the saving wisdom of God. And the Christian response is to be boasting, glorying in this wisdom, the wisdom of His sovereign grace.

2. The *divine employment* of despicable personalities, v. 27-28.

In the employment of pastors today, especially in large churches, it is common for a vigorous examination process to take place that sometimes even includes psychological examination. I once refused such testing on the grounds that it implied Scripture was insufficient in gauging my competency. Of course the approach here is not a justification for the lack of academic ability and culture, hence a preference for a shabby manner and poor communicative abilities. But what really counts is no dependence or boasting with regard to these skills. God can easily take the most unlikely human material and shape it according to His gracious purposes. So to ensure that He receives rightful and exclusive honor, He confounds man who places great emphasis upon learning, culture, breeding,

refinement, etc. He selects spoiled and mouldy ingredients, and blends them into something of astonishing usefulness and beauty.

a. For the purpose of humiliation, v. 27.

“But the foolish things [agencies and people] of the world, God chose [ἐκλέγομαι, eklegomai], in order that He might thoroughly shame [καταισχύνω, kataischunō] the wise [agencies and people of the world], and the weak [agencies and people] of the world God chose, in order that He might thoroughly shame the strong [agencies and people of the world].” In the formation of man, God takes of the dust of the earth; in the formation of Israel, He selects an idolatrous Gentile pagan named Abraham; in the appointment of Israel’s greatest king, He chooses a teenage shepherd boy; in the birth of His Son, He surrounds him with humble circumstances; in the recruitment of the first apostles, Jesus calls Galilean fishermen; in the subsequent history of the Christian Church, He employs workers explaining that their prospects will be hunger, thirst, poor clothing, mistreatment, homelessness. Further, although offering blessing and acting congenially, they will become “slandered, . . . the scum of the world, the dregs of all things” (I Cor. 4:11-13). Yet the resultant success, without human expertise, becomes a wonder that defies rational explanation. But further, the scoffing of those who have watched now becomes humiliation; the absence of the world’s methodology leads to man becoming embarrassed, even annoyed. That which cannot be accounted for is discounted as foolishness and offensive to modern sensibilities.

b. For the purpose of nullification, v. 28.

“And the ignoble/contemptible/lowly [ἀγενής, agenēs, agencies and people] of the world, and the despised/worthless/of no account [ἐξουθενέω, exoutheneō, agencies and people of the world], God chose, the things [agencies and people of the world] not [comparatively] existing, [God chose], in order that those things [agencies and people of the world, comparatively] existing might be annulled/ decommissioned/invalidated [καταργέω, katargeō].” Notice that the literal translation of the more inclusive “things” in the NASB seems intended to draw together both man and his agencies, institutions, procedures, strategies, etc. All of these, being the pride of man, God passes by. Rather He selects individuals and items that seem unimportant, trifling, inconsequential. In so doing He confounds the world order, a Nicodemus, a Herod the Great, a Pontius Pilate, etc. He nullifies their bloated sense of importance.

3. The *divine disqualification* of carnal boasting, v. 29.

“So that all flesh may not boast/proudly brag [καυχάομαι, kauchaomai] before [the] God.” Again, here is the reason for God’s deflating *modus operandi* with man. Ever since the Fall, the race of Adam has aspired to the elevation and promotion of self, and Satan has offered untiring encouragement in this regard along the way. He has especially endeavored to promote man, to stimulate his selfish desires. Whereas God is determined to deflate this program and carefully, exclusively uphold His own glory. This He does through all of the terms of the gospel. Its design is to exalt God by means of man learning of his impotence. So God “pricks the bubble” so to speak; He convinces man of his vanity and foolishness; He displays it through the gospel so that man might, like Job, shut his mouth, bow, confess, hope only in mercy, and then worship. On July 8, 1731, Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon on I Corinthians 1:29-31 titled, “God Glorified In Man’s Dependence,”

from which we would rightly infer that God is *dishonored* by means of man's independence from God. Edwards explains:

“God is glorified in the work of redemption in this that there appears in it so absolute and universal a dependence of the redeemed on him.” . . . So much the more men exalt themselves, so much the less will they surely be disposed to exalt God. It is certainly what God aims at in the disposition of things in redemption (if we allow the Scriptures to be a revelation of God's mind), that God should appear full, and man in himself empty, that God should appear all, and man nothing. . . . It is necessary in order to saving faith, that man should be emptied of himself, be sensible that he is “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Humility is a great ingredient of true faith: he that truly receives redemption, receives it as a little child (Mark 10:15). “Whoever shall not receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, he shall not enter therein.” It is the delight of a believing soul to abase itself and exalt God alone: that is the language of Psalm 115:1. “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to thy name give glory.”¹

Sadly, prominently, interminably, man does “boast before God,” though with little good cause. The real tragedy is that all of this effort is so futile, and of no account in heaven, because the object of this praise is man, not the triune God. But there is great cause for boasting in God, as v. 30 makes abundantly clear.

H. The Fanfare of the Doing of God, vs. 30-31.

1. The *divine amplification* of rightful boasting, v. 30.

“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom for you from God, also righteousness [δικαιοσύνη, dikaiosunē] and sanctification [ἁγιασμός, hagioσmos] and redemption [ἀπολύτρωσις, apolutrōsis].” It is common for the Christian gospel, although simply received through faith alone, yet to be regarded in simplistic terms that fail to grasp the magnitude of what Jesus Christ accomplished through His earthly visitation. Simplistically speaking, people describe their sins as being forgiven and their going to heaven. But how much more is to be considered including election, regeneration, justification, adoption, reception of spiritual gifts, sanctification, glorification, the renovation of the universe, etc. So Paul elsewhere writes of the Christian being shown “in the ages to come . . . the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7), of being “filled up to all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19), of the fact that “in Him [Jesus Christ] you have been made complete” (Col. 2:10).

Notice that here Paul is describing three distinct realities, that nevertheless are related. First we do indeed commence with the profound simplistic truth that, as the NASB translates, “by His [God's] doing you are in Christ Jesus,” in a secure place of refuge for the soul. Hence we agree with Jonah's conclusion that, “salvation is from the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). Second there is what Jesus Christ became from God. Third there is what the believer became, through Christ, from God. And it is the variety of wondrous fruit resulting from this union that we now consider.

We also need to understand that what God the Father *did* for us, was mediated through what Jesus Christ *became* for us. This “becoming” was the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, of He who came from the bosom of His Father in heaven, His eternal home (John 1:18; 17:5). And this whole ministry was for the blessing of those He came to save.

¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, II, pp. 5-7.

- a. Christ became *wisdom* for the believer, who was foolish.

Wisdom is as old as God, and thus is intrinsic to His eternal character. But when Jesus Christ *became* wisdom, He who was essentially and eternally wise (Prov. 8:22-31), yet agreed to embody and execute the wise plan of salvation ordained by His Father (John 4:34; Heb. 10:7). He became the incarnation of wisdom, the personification of wisdom, v. 24 (cf. Luke 2:40, 52), for the purpose of saving the unwise, the foolish, and thus mediating to them the wisdom of God. As the hymn writer has declared:

O loving wisdom of our God!
 When all was sin and shame,
 A second Adam to the fight
 And to the rescue came.

- b. Christ became *righteousness* for the believer, who was unrighteous.

Righteousness is as old as God, and thus is intrinsic to His eternal character. But when Jesus Christ *became* righteousness, He who was essentially and eternally righteous (John 1:1; I John 2:1, 29), yet agreed to embody and execute the righteous plan of salvation ordained by His righteous Father. He became the incarnation of righteousness (II Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9), for the purpose of saving the unrighteous, and thus the imparting to them of the righteousness of God (Rom. 1:16-17; 3:21-26). So Augustus Toplady has written:

Our God in flesh, to set us free,
 Was manifested here;
 And meekly bore our sin, that we
 His righteousness might wear.
 In Him we have a righteousness,
 By God Himself approved,
 Our rock, our sure foundation this,
 Which never can be moved.
 As all, when Adam sinned alone,
 In his transgression died,
 So by the righteousness of One
 Are sinners justified.

- c. Christ became *sanctification* (holy) for the believer, who was unholy.

Sanctification (holiness) is as old as God being holy, and thus is intrinsic to His eternal character. But when Jesus Christ *became* sanctification (holiness), He who was essentially and eternally holy (John 1:1; Heb. 7:26), yet agreed to embody and execute the holy plan of salvation ordained by His Father. He became the incarnation of holiness, v. 2 (Acts 4:27, 30), for the purpose of saving the unholy, thus the imparting to them the holiness of God (Heb. 12:10; II Pet. 1:4).

- d. Christ became *redemption* for the believer, who was enslaved.

Redemption is as old as the goodness of God, especially His merciful concern for a fallen, captive world, and thus is intrinsic to His eternal character. But when Jesus Christ *became* redemption, He who was essentially and eternally good, yet agreed to embody and execute the good plan of redemption ordained by His Father. By this means He “led captive a host of captives” (Eph. 4:8). Thus He became the incarnation of redeeming goodness, v. 2 (Acts 4:27, 30), for the purpose of emancipating slaves “into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21);

2. The *divine mandate* for focused boasting, v. 31.

“In order that, just as it has been written, ‘Whoever boasts, let him boast in the Lord.’” But why? Because we have this incomparable catalog of “all things” in Christ, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (Eph. 1:7). Whatever man or self attempts to contribute alongside of this is utter foolishness. Whereas, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32). It is God, “who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy” (I Tim. 6:17). It is “His divine power [that] has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (II Pet. 1:3).

This being so, then a new year is not to be merely approached with hope of things to come, and resolve, but the confidence that right now, the child of God has “wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” We do not merely hope for the future, even the year 2004. Rather, we boast in what we have right now in Jesus Christ!