

Matt Henry
1 Cor 1:18-31
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“The Right Kind of Fool”

Grace and peace...

If the choice is between foolishness and wisdom, you would expect me to say be wise. Don't be a fool. But here's my premise: everyone is a fool. The only choice we have is whether we're going to be a fool unto ourselves a fool for God. Being a fool for yourself is like the one who stores up riches for himself in that big barn (Luke 12:20), or like some of the Galatians who reverted back to something other than the gospel or maybe even those who say “there is no God” (Ps. 14:1). But the being a good kind of fool, Paul had something to say about that. “We are fools for Christ's sake.” (1 Cor. 4:10). So let's just admit we're fools.

Mark Twain quipped, “Ah well, I am a great and sublime fool. But then I am God's fool, and all His works must be contemplated with respect” (letter to WD Howells, 1877).

“The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of god is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:25). As a demonstration of how foolish God's ways appear, when in fact they are quite wise, consider how He chose the 12 Disciples. This is what we're doing on Wednesdays in Lent. I mean if you want to change the world with 12 young men, wouldn't you pick the best and the brightest?

You'd consider things like: Who is well educated? Who has all the connections? Who has the proper family background? Wouldn't you go with the person who has something to boast about on his resume? Pick the top 12 candidates, tell the rest, "I'm sorry the position is filled" and there you go. That's how the world would do it. Or if the economy was bad back then, Jesus would have called 24 disciples and put them all at half time just so he didn't have to pay benefits! Choosing people based on their qualifications isn't how Jesus chose then and it's not at all how he chooses today. We have nothing to boast in ourselves.

I noticed in my concordance, the words "boast, boasting, boastful" are used about 30 times in the whole Bible. But more than half of those usages are found in 1 and 2 Corinthians. Why? Division was threatening to tear the church in Corinth apart. They were boasting in themselves.

So Paul has to write to them these words, beginning in v. 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." Now some may have been, but Paul says "not many". It seems to be the exception, rather than the rule. Verse 27: "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is low and despised in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to

nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” When it comes to following Jesus, it’s our lack of qualification that is our qualification. If you’ve ever felt inadequate, you’re perfect! If you’ve ever doubted yourself, God wants you! If you’ve ever felt rejected, overlooked or outperformed, God wants you all the more. His first choice is the low, the weak, the despised.

I receive an occasional e-mail devotion called “God Thoughts Wired” and it was helpful in reminding me whom God used.

Abraham and Sarah thought they were *too old*...but they weren't (see [Genesis 18:14](#)). Joseph was *abused as a child*, but **that didn't stop God from using him powerfully** (see [Genesis 50:20](#)).

Like David and Moses, Paul was *a murderer*, but God's grace was sufficient for all three of them (see [2 Corinthians 12:9](#)).

Gideon was *scared to death*, but God used him anyway. Rahab was *a prostitute*, but God used her anyway. Timothy was considered *too young*, but God used him anyway. Elijah was *suicidal*, but God used him anyway. Naomi was *a widow*, but God used her anyway.

Jonah initially *ran away* from God, but was given another chance. Job *lost everything*, and God glorified Himself through it. Peter was *an impulsive hot-*

head, and he became "the first Pope." The disciples *fell asleep praying*...Martha was *a worry-wart*...Mary Magdalene was *demon-possessed*...the Samaritan woman was *divorced five times*...Zacchaeus was *too small*...

And, oh yeah...Lazarus was *dead*!

See how easily God delights in using imperfect people? This is the narrative woven throughout Scripture. Paul will later say in 2 Cor. 11, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness" (2 Cor. 11:30). So, the next time you try and excuse yourself from something, just keep in mind, the way God works, *you might just be proving His point!*

Now why would God work this way? Well, of course it's to His glory. It's most obvious this way that He's the One at work, not us. It keeps us from boasting in ourselves and it compels us to boast in Him! Boasting is really a form of praise. And praise is so powerful.

If I may, I'd like to apply this concept to marriage, but it works for any relationship. If you've ever heard second hand a compliment paid to you, and if it's genuine, that really lifts the spirit. Don't get me wrong. A husband and wife should complement each other often, but publicly praising your spouse in an appropriate way builds love and confidence. Letting that praise appropriately spill over into our conversation with others enhances the relationships we speak of.

There's even a study backing this up! Get this. According to a report from the University of Washington, how spouses talk about each other to their friends and family predicts their success as a married couple. It's a 10-year study the UW conducted where they interviewed 95 couples, just six months into their marriage. They had an hour-long interview and more importantly than *what* was said about their relationship, their parents and their philosophy on marriage was *how they said it*. Researchers noted whether couples could express fondness and admiration for each other, talk about themselves as a unit, finish each other's sentences...things like that. With this information alone, just an hour interview and time to observe, researchers predicted with 87% accuracy whether a couple would stay married or be divorced ten years later. Think about that: how you talk about your spouse is a huge indicator—even a predictor—of the state of the union. (Source: Thriving Families, July/August 2010, p. 42)

Every couple has a *toast* at the wedding, but not every couple has a *boast* in their marriage. But it's there if they want it! So here's the challenge to married couples: I know you thought it was your job to keep the other person humble. But guess what? A husband needs to know his wife believes in them. And a wife needs to know her husband cherishes her. So offer up some genuine praise in your conversation and daily life. And the result of those words may just

be exactly what you've always wanted *even if it doesn't get back to your spouse*.

Why? Because it will shape your heart for that person.

Parents, you can even boast in your children! They will love it!

Which brings me to the best boasting of all—and the hardest to believe.

Would you believe that God actually boasts about us? What's there to boast about? Well, we're His children. He sings over us. He delights in us. He calls us chosen and precious in His sight. He calls us royal priests and a holy nation. He says, "These are my people. I am their God." The boasting is based in who we are in Christ, as redeemed and forgiven children of God. Christ crucified is our boast. Nothing else.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 is what Paul quotes when he tell us to boast in the Lord.

"Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the might man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth."

We are not just fools. We are God's fools. And what a privilege it is. I believe as fools of God we are called to not live for ourselves but for God and for others. I believe we are called to be foolish enough to think that people can grow unto the maturity and fullness of Christ. We are called to be foolish enough to

know discipling is how it happened then, and discipling is how it's going to happen even still today.

In Jesus' name, Amen.